



BODY IMAGE WORKSHOP

We utilized and frequently quoted from Common Sense Media's 2015 research brief [Children, Teens, Media, and Body Image](#) to create this discussion guide. We recommend visiting [Common Sense Media](#) for additional information on this subject matter.

(This guide can be altered to work for participants aged 9 to 18)

Workshop mission:

This workshop aims to create a positive and informative discussion around body image for teens and tweens. Participants will explore the impact body image has on self-esteem, examine how external factors such as media trends shape how children and teens see themselves as well as shape societal beauty norms, and take part in an activity that encourages positive and healthy self-assessment.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Awareness of the role body image plays with self-esteem and overall mental and physical health
- Understanding of internal and external influences that help shape one's body image (family, friends/peers, toys, media, etc.)
- Further development of media literacy skills to analyze various forms of media to see the correlation between media trends and body concerns
- Ability and PERMISSION to **positively** assess their own bodies

Preparation:

This workshop will take approximately 2.5 hours, depending on how in-depth the discussions are and the participation level of your students/child(ren). You will also need the following: media examples to analyze (a set of examples is available in this discussion guide), paper and crayons, colored pencils or colorful markers.

Discussion and activity plan:

Introduction to terms and concepts

This workshop begins with an introduction of terms that will be used throughout the lesson. Ask your student(s)/child(ren) to define all/some of these words and concepts if they can, and then follow up with additional information if necessary:

- **Body image:** One's perceptions, thoughts, feelings and actions toward one's body. Body image is typically conceptualized through body size, evaluation of physical attractiveness and emotions associated with body shape. (Grogan, 2006; Cash, 2004)



- **Body dissatisfaction:** An individual's negative feelings toward his or her body, often regarding weight and size. (Polivy & Herman, 2002; McLaren & Kuh, 2004)
- **Eating disorder:** An illness that results in serious disturbances of one's daily diet. Individuals with eating disorders can overeat or starve themselves and frequently suffer from body dissatisfaction, depression and/or other mental health concerns. Common eating disorders include anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and binge eating disorder. (National Institute of Mental Health, 2007)
- **Self-objectification:** A psychological process by which people — especially girls and women — internalize others' objectifying perspectives of their bodies, thus becoming self-monitors of their own appearance. (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Calogero, Davis & Thompson, 2005)
- **Sexual objectification:** The act of reducing another person's value to that of an object of sexual desire or gaze. (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Calogero, Davis & Thompson, 2005)
- **Traditional media:** Forms of media that existed before the internet, including magazines, television, music and advertisements.
- **Digital media:** Forms of electronic, often Web-based, media and communications, including websites, apps and games.

Introduction to statistics and trends with body dissatisfaction in children and teens

Now that your student(s)/child(ren) are familiar with the terms we'll be using, introduce some facts and study statistics on body dissatisfaction as it pertains to children and teens to highlight some of the troubling trends in this area. Select facts and study statistics that are age-appropriate for the age range of your student(s)/child(ren).

Young children are beginning to experience body dissatisfaction – Common Sense Media

- *Really young children begin to develop body image alongside the growth of their physical, cognitive and social abilities; even infants have a general sense of their bodies. (Slaughter & Brownell, 2013)*
- *More than any other appearance attribute, weight is most commonly associated with body dissatisfaction for both girls and boys. (Jones, 2002)*
- *More than half of girls (55–59%) and approximately a third of boys (33–35%) aged 6 to 8 indicate their ideal bodies are thinner than their current body. (Lowes & Tiggemann, 2003)*
- *Nearly a third of children aged 5 to 6 choose an ideal body size that is thinner than their current perceived size. (Hayes & Tantleff-Dunn, 2010)*
- *26% of 5-year-olds recommend dieting behavior (not eating junk food, eating less) as a solution for a person who has gained weight (Lowes & Tiggemann, 2003), and by the time they're 7 years old, 1 in 4 children has engaged in some kind of dieting behavior.*

The damaging effects of body dissatisfaction – Common Sense Media

- *Between 1999 and 2006, hospitalizations for eating disorders among children below the age of 12 spiked 119%. (Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 2009)*
- *It is estimated that almost 1.3 million adolescent girls in the United States have anorexia. (Rosen & the Committee on Adolescence, 2010)*

Discuss these facts: Do these statistics surprise your student(s)/child(ren)? If so, why? Can they relate to any of these statistics or statements?

Influences that shape our body image

Begin the discussion on body image, body dissatisfaction and beauty ideals by asking your student(s)/child(ren) what influences or helps determine those. For the purposes of our workshop, we will focus on the following:

- **Individual factors:** Children's own weight status is a strong predictor of self-esteem and body satisfaction (Ferguson et al., 2014). Psychological characteristics such as self-esteem, the feeling of a lack of control, depression, anxiety and troubled interpersonal relationships also have been linked to body-related perceptions and behaviors, especially among children and teens who go on to have eating disorders. — Common Sense Media
- **Family:** Parents are key to children's healthy development, and body image is no exception. For instance, girls whose fathers tended to express concern about the girls' weights judged themselves to be less physically able than those whose fathers didn't (Davison & Birch, 2001). In the same study, girls whose mothers expressed similar concern judged themselves to be less physically and cognitively able. Lowes & Tiggemann (2003) found that 5- to 8-year-old children's perception of their mothers' body dissatisfaction predicted their own body dissatisfaction (Lowes & Tiggemann, 2003). — Common Sense Media

The following Dove Legacy video below explores the connection a mothers' body dissatisfaction may have on her children. You might want to show the video to your student(s)/child(ren) to give them a tangible example of this inherited body dissatisfaction.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Paknd1ohhT4>



- **Peers:** Peers exert influence, as do intermediate contextual factors. One innovative study found that fifth- and sixth-grade students who attended schools where older students were present reported more negative body images than girls of the same age who attended schools with only younger students (Strauss et al., 2014). — Common Sense Media
- **Larger societal and cultural factors:** Prevailing norms and patterns in race, class and gender all have roles in body image. In the U.S., research indicates that teens of different racial and ethnic groups are differentially prone to body-image issues: Generally speaking, eating disorders are more prevalent among white, middle-class girls; Asian-American teens experience high rates of body dissatisfaction; and African-American teens appear to not internalize an unrealistic thin ideal to the same extent as other groups. — Common Sense Media
- **Traditional media:** Media (television, movies, music, magazines, advertising) messages about girls/women commonly emphasize the value of being young and beautiful — and especially



thin. Messages about boys/men can also set unrealistic or largely unattainable expectations when it comes to body image. — Common Sense Media

- *In a national survey by the Girl Scouts Research Institute (2010) of girls aged 13 to 17, nearly half (48%) wished they were as skinny as the models they saw in fashion magazines and said fashion magazines gave them a body image to strive for (47%).*
- *Another survey by The Today Show and AOL.com (2014) found that 80% of teen girls compare themselves to images of celebrities they see, and within that group, almost half say the images make them feel dissatisfied with the way they look.*
- *Male action figures that young boys tend to play with are even more egregiously unrealistic. Their measurements now exceed even those of the biggest bodybuilders. (Pope, Olivardia, Gruber & Borowiecki, 1999)*
- *The muscle size of male models in Playgirl centerfolds has increased in this same period of time. (Leit, Pope & Gray, 2001)*
- *The male body is very visible in advertising, with a steady rise in the proportion of undressed males in ads beginning in the 1980s. (Leit et al., 2001)*
- **Social media:** *Three-quarters of teens have a social media profile (Common Sense Media, 2012). These digital social networks provide young people opportunities for self-expression and relationships on an unprecedented scale, but they are also a vast public platform for self-presentation, communication and social comparison. — Common Sense Media*
 - *Among the teens active on social networks, 35% reported having worried about people tagging them in unattractive photos.*
 - *27% reported feeling stressed out about how they look when they post pictures.*
 - *22% reported feeling bad about themselves when nobody comments on or “likes” the photos they post. Though girls and boys alike reported having these feelings, they were more common among girls. (Common Sense Media, 2012)*
 - *One study of teen girls found that Facebook users were significantly more likely than non-Facebook users to have internalized a drive for thinness and to engage in body surveillance. (Tiggemann & Slater, 2013)*

Discuss these Influences: Focus on each one, and ask your student(s)/child(ren) how these factors might influence someone's sense of self. Have your student(s)/child(ren) give examples for each influence.

Analysis on how media negatively and positively influences body image

After discussing the influential factors, have student(s)/child(ren) use [media literacy skills](#) to analyze various pieces of media and discuss what messages these pieces of media might be sending. Below are a few examples of media we used during our workshop. We encourage utilizing media that will be interesting and age-appropriate for your student(s)/child(ren).

A CULTURAL ICON: Miss America



Additional facts and questions to present to your student(s)/child(ren):

- o *The average body mass index (BMI) of Miss America winners has decreased from around 22 in the 1920s to 16.9 in the 2000s. According to the World Health Organization, a normal BMI falls between 18.5 and 24.9 (Byrd-Bredbenner, Murray & Schlusel, 2005). — Common Sense Media*
- o Ask your student(s)/child(ren) what the possible outcomes might be when your cultural body ideal is an unhealthy one according to BMI standards.

PRINT ADS



Additional facts and questions to present to your student(s)/child(ren):

- **Victoria's Secret** – The Perfect Body campaign received quite a bit of backlash when it launched. Can your student(s)/child(ren) see why people may have had a problem with Victoria's Secret's depiction of a "perfect body"?



HATCH DISCUSSION GUIDE

- **Calvin Klein Man** – What physical attributes do the media assign to the male ideal?
- **Dolce & Gabbana** – Take a look at the untouched color photo from Madonna's Dolce & Gabbana ad shoot, and compare it with the final version of the ad in black and white. What are some differences between the two pictures? What did the advertisers do to manipulate her image into a more “ideal woman”? Ask them to consider what other beauty ideals beyond muscularity and thinness we place on men and women.

After reviewing your selected media, work with your student(s)/child(ren) to list the various beauty/body ideals for each gender based on the media you've reviewed and your students'/children's experience.

Discuss these ideals, and ask your student(s)/child(ren) to consider which ones encourage healthy body image ideals and which can be detrimental.

Activity

Positive self-portrait activity

This activity is designed to encourage and in some cases give your students/child(ren) permission to love their body openly. Before you begin this activity, you might want to start by acknowledging that this will be a difficult exercise for some, as we don't often allow ourselves to openly celebrate our positive body traits, though we often are happy to celebrate others'. We also suggest dividing into smaller, same-sex groups of three to six if you are planning to do this with a larger group, though a workshop leader should be present when each smaller group reviews its self-portraits. (If you are doing this lesson plan with one student or child, feel free to take part in the activity as well!)

Prior to this activity, you can show a short video that emphasizes the difficulty many people have with seeing positive body traits in themselves:

Dove Real Beauty Sketches <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XpaOjMXyJGk>



- Hand out paper and crayons, colored pencils or markers.
- Give your student(s)/child(ren) 20 to 25 minutes to draw a portrait of themselves, head to toe, and list five things about their bodies that they love along with two to three sentences describing why they love this part of their body.
- Have each student/child present their self-portrait along with the five areas they love and discuss these points with the group. If you are doing this exercise with one child, you can participate in the self-portrait activity as well.
- After everyone has presented, discuss the activity and any learning they may have gleaned from participating.

Resources:

<https://www.common sense media.org/research/children-teens-media-and-body-image>