ALL BODIES ARE GOOD BODIES: BODY POSITIVITY IN THE CLASSROOM

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Purpose

- Acknowledge the unconscious bias that weight is directly correlated with health.
- Learn strategies for promoting body positivity in the classroom and in course work.
- Start a toolkit of body positive resources.

Background

The National Eating Disorder Information Centre (NEDIC), reports that "8 to 17% of post-secondary students are affected with an eating disorder" (2022). Plus size people, in particular, continually experience weight bias and weight stigma related to characteristics such as laziness, lack of leadership, and lack of intelligence; in a learning environment, students with larger bodies feel an additional layer of exclusion (O'Connor, 2019). Body image is directly related to self-esteem and a sense of belonging; if someone feels that they don't meet society's acceptable standards for body image, they will have an extremely difficult time developing confidence in themselves and their ability to achieve success.

How To

Size, Weight, and Diversity

On a daily basis, we receive constant imaging and information that leads us to make negative associations with our bodies. Discussions about diversity often exclude size and weight because these characteristics are seen as individual issues (O'Connor, 2019, para. 12). If every person practiced the same exercise routine and followed the same meal plan every day, we would all still look differently because of bone structure, body size, shape, and weight (National Eating Disorders Association, 2022). Despite the uniqueness of every body, we continually strive to achieve unrealistic, overarching body image ideals. We need to make a conscious effort to change our perceptions of and discussions about the size of bodies.

Create a Body Positive Classroom Environment:

- Arrange the furniture in the room for ease of access, movement and personal space.
- Expose students to materials (images, readings, etc.) that include diverse body shapes and sizes, outward appearances, and physical abilities.
- Encourage and model critical viewing of social and other media messages.
- Discuss physical activity, movement, and exercise as fun primarily and secondarily as these actions relate to good mental and physical health.
- Convey the natural existence of bodies of all shapes, sizes, weights, abilities, and colours at every available opportunity.
- Avoid making jokes about your own body image and the food choices you make.
- Express appreciation for your own body and the functions each part of your body performs.
- Include weight and shape in discussions about respect for diversity in race, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, etc.

Body Positive Resources:

fabUplus Magazine
National Eating Disorder Information Centre (NEDIC)
NEDIC - SPARK (training and education sessions; digital campaign materials)
National Eating Disorders Association – Developing & Modeling Positive Body Image
NEDA – Body Activism Guide
Obesity Canada
Positive Psychology – Body Image (activities; worksheets)

References

Government of Manitoba. (n.d.). *How to Encourage Health Body Image at School*.
        https://www.gov.mb.ca/healthyschools/docs/healthy_body_image.pdf

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        https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/every-body-different

National Eating Disorder Information Centre (NEDIC). (2022). *Increasing Eating Disorder Support With Instant Chat*. https://nedic.ca/spark/

O'Connor, C. (27 November, 2019). *Creating a Body-Positive Classroom*. Edutopia.
        https://www.edutopia.org/article/creating-body-positive-classroom