



Talking about food and health

INTRODUCTION

This module contains professional development material for educators, learning activities for children and parent tip sheets, which can be sent home or displayed in your centre. All materials are linked to the National Quality Standards and to the Early Years Learning Framework.

The module is divided into three Learning Areas:

1. What is body image?
2. Talking about food and health
3. Words matter!

Each Learning Area contains:

- Professional development sheets for educators;
- Case studies for educators to think about or discuss in a group;
- Learning activities for children;
- A list of books and web resources suitable for Early Years Services.

Key messages

- Everyone is special.
- Who we are is more important than how we look.
- All foods can be part of a healthy diet, in moderation and appropriate portions.

These learning activities will help young children to:

- Express their individuality through discussion, craft, singing and dance;
- Recognise that although we are different in some ways, in many ways, we are all the same;



- Talk about their hunger and fullness signals; and □ Experience eating in a mindful manner.

Links to the Nation Quality Standard

The National Quality Standard (NQS) sets the national benchmarks for early childhood education and care, and also for outside school hours care in Australia. When implemented in the early childhood education and care setting, this module meets the following requirements of the NQS:

QUALITY AREA	STANDARD	ELEMENT
Quality area 1		
Educational program and practice	1.1 An approved learning framework informs the development of a curriculum that enhances each child's learning and development	1.1.1 1.1.2 1.1.3
	1.2 Educators and co-ordinators are focused, active and reflective in designing and delivering the program for each child	1.2.1 1.2.2 1.2.3
Quality area 2		
	2.1 Each child's health and physical activity is supported and promoted.	2.2.1 2.2.2
Quality area 5		
	5.1 Respectful and equitable relationships are developed and maintained with each child.	5.1.1 5.1.2
	5.2 Each child is supported to build and maintain sensitive and responsive relationships with other children and adults.	5.2.1 5.2.2

	6.1 Respectful relationships with families are developed and maintained and families are supported in their parenting role.	6.1.1 6.1.2
Quality area 6		
	6.2 Collaborative partnerships enhance children's inclusion, learning and wellbeing.	6.2.2
Quality area 7		
	7.2 Effective leadership builds and promotes a positive organisational culture and professional learning community.	7.2.1

Links to the Early Years Framework

The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) consists of five Outcomes to assist educators to enhance and develop a foundation for successful learning in children from birth to five years of age. The relevance of the *Module 5: Body Image* learning activities to the EYLF can be seen in the matrix below:

Outcome 1 Children have a strong sense of identity	✓
Outcome 2 Children are connected with and contribute to their world	

Outcome 3 Children have a strong sense of wellbeing	✓
Outcome 4 Children are confident and involved learners	✓
Outcome 5 Children are effective communicators	✓

Module 5: Body image

OVERVIEW

Some learning activities require prior preparation, so please refer to the **RESOURCES REQUIRED** list below. Activity sheets are already included in each separate learning activity (where required).

	RESOURCES REQUIRED
What I like about me	Book: Zobel, N. A., & Sakamoto, M. (2005). <i>What I like about me!</i> . New York: Reader's Digest Children's Books. <input type="checkbox"/> Mirrors for children to use to draw self portraits <input type="checkbox"/> Selection of drawing materials.
All of me	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 x poem per child • Butcher's paper • Pictures cut from magazines or magazines, and scissors <input type="checkbox"/> Glue
I'm glad I'm me	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 x poem 'I'm glad I'm me' • Shaving cream (enough for each child to have a portion)



All about me playlist	Device to connect to Spotify and play music—phone or computer with speakers
The skin you live in	Book: Tyler, M., & Csicsko, D. L. (2005). <i>The skin you live in</i> . Chicago, Ill: Chicago Children's Museum. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ink pads • Paper • Magnifying glasses
Shapesville	Book: Mills, A., Osborn, B., & Neitz, E. (2003). <i>Shapesville</i> . Carlsbad, Calif. : London: Gurze ; Hi Marketing. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction materials • Glue • Sticky tape • Camera or phone to take photographs of the constructions
Full mouse, empty mouse	Book: Zeckhausen, D., & Boyd, B. (2008). <i>Full mouse, empty mouse: A tale of food and feelings</i> . Washington, DC: Magination Press.
Mindfulness	□ Sultanas—at least enough for one per child
At home activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Picture books on body image, teasing, diversity etc. • Bucket or bag to take books home in • Scrap book • Up to date photos of each of the children

Overview

A range of activities designed to encourage children to learn about themselves and one another have been provided. It is designed to foster positive body image by highlighting children's individuality as well as their similarities.

Some activities focus on developing a positive relationship with food that aims to encourage children to connect to their hunger signals and to explore foods textures and tastes mindfully.

The following table outlines the contents of this module:

Learning area	Professional development: tip sheet	Professional development : Case study	Learning activities	Parent tip sheets	At home activities
What is body image?	What is body image Educators role in developing positive body image	Body image Body image Diversity Educators role	Shapesville What I like about me All of me I'm glad I'm me All about me playlist	Body image	I can Book Bucket Guess which baby?
Talking about food and health	Talking about food and health Mindfulness and food Screen time and media	Educators role	Full mouse, empty mouse Eating mindfully	Talking about food and health Facts about diets	
Words matter!	Teasing does matter Avoid fat talk	Fat talk and teasing	The skin you live in	Teasing does matter How to deal with fat talk	

Learning area 2: Talking about food and health.

This learning area contains the following information :

Learning area	Professional development: Tip sheet	Professional development: Case study	Learning activities	Parent tip sheets
Talking about food and health	Talking about food and health Mindfulness and food Screen time and media	Educators role	Full mouse, empty mouse Eating mindfully	Talking about food and health Facts about diets

How to use this material:

Professional development tip sheet: Read

Professional development: case study: Read as individual, or as a group. Think about how you would respond in this situation. If using the material as a group, it can be helpful to role play the scenario.

Learning activities: These activities are to be used with the children. Books, music and poetry are included for this learning area.

Parent tip sheets: May be sent home or displayed in the centre.

At home activities: May be sent home to encourage caregivers to think about their role in the development of body image in young children.

Professional development for educators



Professional development: Educator tip sheet Talking about food and health

Children learn about food from a very early age, and they are influenced mostly by their parents and caregivers. Since many Australian children spend a great deal of time in childcare, it's important that the messages they receive from Early Years Educators about food are correct and are healthy.

Some important things to remember when talking about food with children include:

1. Avoid labeling foods as 'good' or 'bad'

- All foods can fit into healthy diet – there is no such thing as 'good' or 'bad' foods.
- Labelling food as 'bad' makes children think they are forbidden, which can make them more tempting and exciting. It can also encourage them to 'binge' on 'forbidden' foods, and then feel guilty afterwards.
- Labelling foods as 'good' has been shown to make people think they won't taste as good as the 'bad' foods, and so children may be less likely to choose to eat them.
- Encourage children to eat in moderation, in the appropriate portions of food for their age and size. Australian Dietary Guidelines for children can be found [here](#)

2. Avoid talking about dieting in front of children

- Talking about dieting can influence children to think that weight and size are really important, and might encourage them to limit what they are eating
- Dieting is known as an important risk factor for developing an eating disorder.

3. Encourage children to eat 'mindfully'

- 'Mindfulness' is the practice of 'paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally'.
- Mindful eating encourages children to be aware of the smell of food, the taste and texture of food, and to enjoy their food without overeating.

4. Encourage children to listen to their 'hunger cues'

Many of us have forgotten to listen to our body's hunger signals, and eat because it is a certain time of day, because food is offered or in response to emotions such as boredom or sadness or in celebration.



Teaching children to be mindful of their body's signals for hunger is an important way for them to be in control of how much food they eat.

It's important for children to recognise hunger, as well as when they are full.

Sometimes we might experience 'emotional hunger'. This might happen when we have self-defeating thoughts, feel sad or stressed.

You can help a child to determine if they're really hungry by involving them in something else for a little while and seeing if the hunger goes away. If it does, then it's likely it was emotional, but if they're still complaining of hunger 10 minutes later, it's likely they're really hungry.

5. Focus on positive messages about food

- Studies have shown that health campaigns which attempt to scare people into changing behaviours are less successful than health campaigns which talk about the benefits of good behaviours.
- The same is true for talking about food. Rather than making food a 'guilty pleasure', we should encourage children to enjoy healthy foods and see them as part of their everyday diet.

6. Encourage variety and trying new foods

- A child may try a new food up to ten times before they begin to like it. This means we should encourage them to try a food they have rejected before. As we grow, so do our tastes and preferences. Children should be taught this and encouraged to experiment with new tastes and foods often.
- Be a positive role model and always try new foods yourself.

7. Encourage enjoyment of food

- Eating should be a pleasant, social experience.
- Food is not just about the nutrients it contains. We should focus on the taste, feel, texture and enjoyment of whole foods, instead of focusing on nutrients alone.

For more information on what body image is, go to: <https://butterfly.org.au/body-image/body-image-explained/>



If you have any concerns about your own body image or eating disorders get help from:

Call: 1800 ED HOPE / 1800 33 4673 Monday–Friday 8am to 9pm

Professional development: Educator tip sheet

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the practice of focusing attention on the present moment, without judgment.

Mindfulness is not really a kind of meditation – it’s just a way of appreciating what is going on around you in the present time.

Mindfulness has been used successfully in studies related to:

- Weight loss;
- Reducing binge eating; and □ Reducing food cravings.

Being mindful helps to:

- Be fully present, here and now;
- To become less judgmental;
- To increase self-awareness;
- To learn the difference between you and your thoughts;
- To learn that everything changes;
- That thoughts and feelings come and go like the weather; and □ To develop self-acceptance and self-compassion.

You may think this is a difficult concept to teach to very young children, but there are lots of mindfulness activities which have been found to help children’s social and emotional development.

In relation to body image development, mindfulness practice can help children to:

- Become more fully aware of their hunger cues, as well as feelings of fullness;
- Take part in less ‘all or nothing’ thinking;



- Be more accepting of themselves and of others; and
- Be aware of emotions, and to be able to experience uncomfortable emotions, and deal with them more effectively.

Mindfulness activities for children can be found [here](#):

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Professional development: Case studies

This section contains some examples of situations where it might be difficult to talk to other educators, parents or children about weight, exercise, food or body image.

Each of the examples is based on an actual situation described by an educator during focus groups and interviews about body image, so they are as real as possible.

The examples could be used during staff meetings as part of training, where educators could talk through how they would respond in each situation. Role plays in small groups or as a whole team might be good fun.

Sometimes it's hard to think of a way to react to tricky situations on the spot, so by practicing each situation, you might feel more prepared if it comes up in the future!

Professional development: Case study

Fat talk and dieting

At your centre, all staff are encouraged to eat lunch at the table with the children, and for healthy modelling, they are expected to eat the same things that the children are served. A new staff member says she won't have the rice dish the children are eating because she has started a diet, and will be having a meal replacement shake instead. She proceeds to prepare her shake at the table, to drink it while the children are eating, and to talk about how many kilos she has to lose, and how great she will look in her bikini by summer time. The children continue to eat, and talk amongst themselves, and appear to not be listening.

As a group, discuss what would you do in this situation.

Some examples of how to deal with this situation include:

- *When interviewing and employing new staff, talk to them about the expectation that staff will eat with the children, no matter what the children are served. In cases where the staff has an allergy or is unable to eat those foods for cultural reasons, they could bring their own food, but it would be valuable for the staff member to discuss that with the children.*
- *It would be valuable for the children to learn about the staff member's culture or to understand allergy.*
- *When new staff members begin at your children's service, they could be asked to complete an induction manual. The body image materials from SNACPlus could be included as part of their training package.*

Learning activities for children



Learning activity

Full mouse, empty mouse: Read and discuss

Read “Full Mouse, empty mouse: A tale of food and feelings” by Zeckhausen & Boyd. This is a book suited for children aged six and older, so it may not be possible to read in one sitting.

- Ask children to think about how it feels when they’re hungry. Encourage them to think about their rumbling tummies.
- Ask children to think about how they feel when they get thirsty. Talk about how sometimes it can be hard to tell if we’re hungry or thirsty, so it’s a good idea to have a drink of water and see if they still have a rumbling tummy.
- When children feel hungry, ask them to think about what kinds of foods they like to eat. Be careful not to judge foods as good or bad.
- Ask children to think about how they feel when they have eaten too much. Talk about how it feels to be full.
- Talk about how our body tells us when we’re hungry and thirsty, and that it’s important to listen to our body when it talks to us.

Learning activity:

Eating mindfully: Describe

- This activity encourages children to think about eating and to savour the experience.
- Ask children to sit in a circle. Explain that you are going to give each child a sultana, but they can’t eat it yet.
- Ask each child to describe how the sultana looks.
- Ask the children to think about how the sultana feels in their hand.
- Ask the children to smell the sultana and think about how they would describe the smell.
- Explain to the children that they are going to put the sultana in their mouth, but not bite it yet.
- Ask them to think about how the sultana feels and tastes in their mouth.
- Tell the children they can bite into the sultana.



- Ask them to chew slowly, and really think about how the sultana tastes before they swallow it.
- Ask the children to describe how the sultana felt, smelled and tasted.
- This activity can be repeated at any time during meals or snacks, using different kinds of foods.

Tip sheets for caregivers

Caregiver tip sheet: Talking about food and health

Children learn about food from a very early age, and they are influenced mostly by their parents and caregivers. It's important the messages children get about food are correct and healthy.

Some important things to remember when talking about food with children include:

1. Avoid labeling foods as 'good' or 'bad'

- All foods can fit into healthy diet. There is no such thing as 'good' or 'bad' foods.
- Labelling food as 'bad' makes children think they are forbidden, making them more tempting and exciting. It can also encourage them to 'binge' on 'forbidden' foods, and then feel guilty afterwards.
- Labelling foods as 'good' has been shown to make people think they won't taste as good as the 'bad' foods. This might make children less likely to choose them.
- Encourage children to eat in moderation, in the appropriate portions of food for their age and size. Australian Dietary Guidelines for children can be found [here](#)



2. Avoid talking about dieting in front of children

- Talking about dieting can influence children to think that weight and size are really important, and might encourage them to limit what they are eating.
- Dieting is a risk factor for developing an eating disorder.

3. Encourage children to eat 'mindfully'

- 'Mindfulness' means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally.
- 'Mindful' eating encourages children to be aware of the smell, taste and texture of food, and to enjoy food without eating too much.
- Teaching children to be 'mindful' of their body's signals for hunger is an important way for them to be in control of how much food they eat.

4. Encourage children to listen to their 'hunger cues'

- Many of us have forgotten to listen to our body's signs of hunger. We might eat because it is a certain time of day, because food is offered or in response to emotions such as boredom or sadness or in celebration.
- It's important for children to recognise feelings of hunger, as well as when they are full.
- Sometimes we might experience 'emotional hunger'. This might happen when we have self-defeating thoughts, feel sad or stressed.
- You can help a child to determine if they're really hungry by involving them in something else for a little while and seeing if the hunger goes away.
- If it does, then it's likely it was emotional, but if they're still complaining of hunger 10 minutes later, it's likely they are really hungry.

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- Be a positive role model and try new foods yourself.

7. Encourage enjoyment of food

- Eating should be a pleasant, social experience.
- Food is not just about the nutrients it contains. We should focus on the taste, feel, texture and enjoyment of whole foods, instead of focusing on nutrients alone.

More can be found about encouraging a healthy diet [here](#)

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Caregiver tip sheet: Mindful eating

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Mindfulness is a way of appreciating what is going on around you in the present time.

Mindfulness has been used successfully in studies related to:

- Weight loss;
- Reducing binge eating; and □ Reducing food cravings.

Being mindful helps to:

- Be fully present, here and now;
- To become less judgmental;



- To increase self-awareness;
- To learn the difference between you and your thoughts;
- To learn that everything changes;
- That thoughts and feelings come and go like the weather; and □ To develop self-acceptance and self-compassion.

You may think this is a difficult concept to teach to very young children, but there are lots of mindfulness activities that have been found to help children's social and emotional development.

In relation to body image development, mindfulness practice can help children to:

- Become more fully aware of their hunger signs, as well as feelings of fullness;
- Take part in less 'all or nothing' thinking;
- Be more accepting of themselves and of others; and
- Be aware of emotions, and to be able to experience uncomfortable emotions, and deal with them more effectively.

Mindfulness activities for children can be found [here](#):

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Other resources

The following pages list body image resources, including books and webpages.

These include:

- Children's books about body image and self-esteem;
- Children's books about diversity;
- Children's books about food and feelings; □ Reference books for educators.
- Links to online materials.



You can access the SNACPlus body image resources Facebook page and Pinterest page.

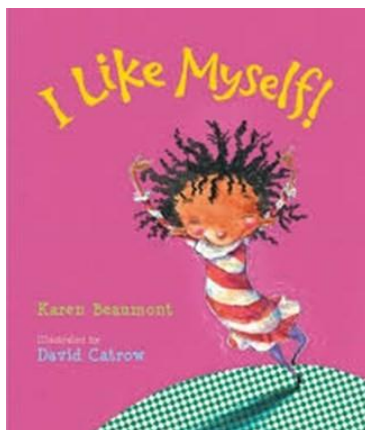


To access the Facebook page click [here](#)

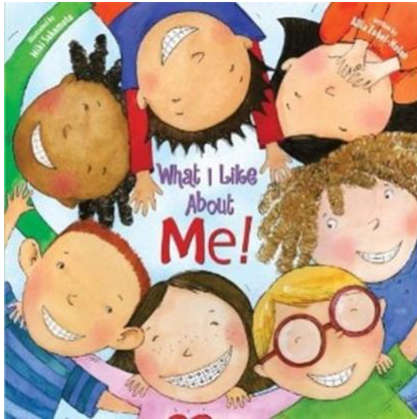


To access the Pinterest page, click [here](#)

Books about body image and self-esteem

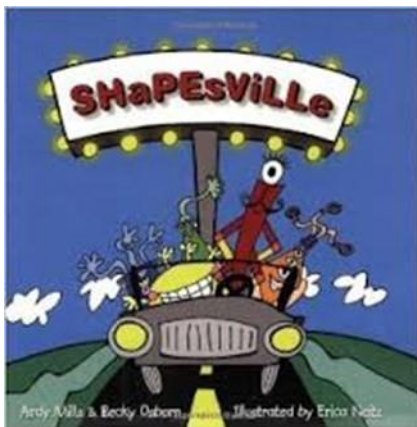


Beaumont, K. , & Catrow, D. (2004). *I like myself!*
Boston Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.



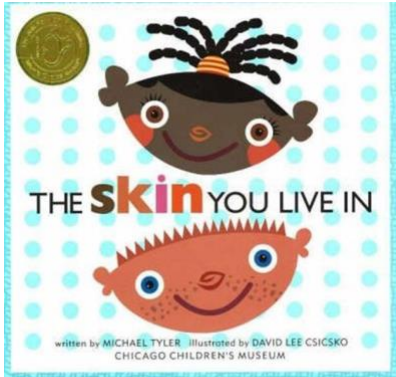
<https://www.amazon.com.au/I-Like-Myself-Board-Book/dp/0544641019>

Zobel, N. A., & Sakamoto, M. (2005). *What I like about me!* New York: Reader's Digest Children's Books.

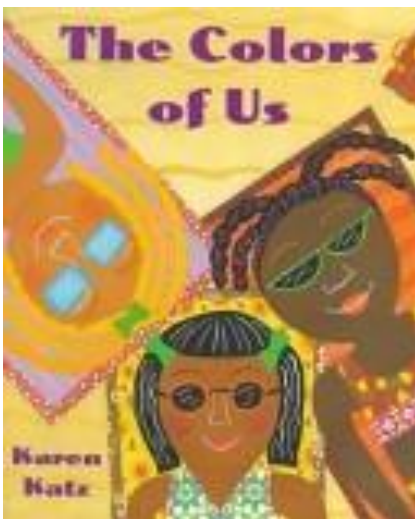


Mills, A., Osborn, B., & Neitz, E. (2003). *Shapesville*. Carlsbad, Calif.: London: Gurze ; Hi Marketing.

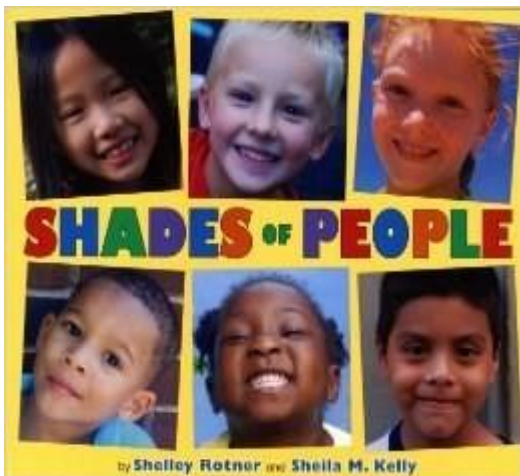
Books about diversity



Tyler, M., & Csicsko, D. L. (2005). *The skin you live in*. Chicago, Ill: Chicago Children's Museum.

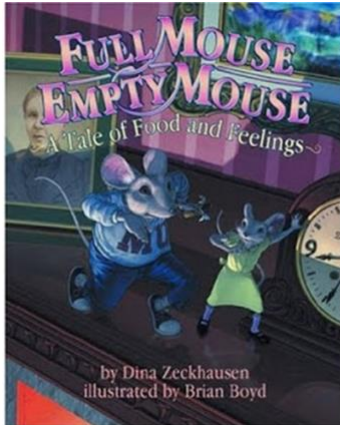


Katz, K. *The colors of us*. New York: Henry Holt and Co.

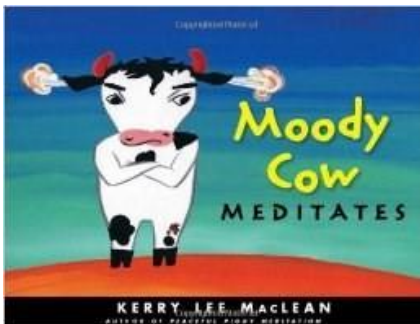


Rotner and Kelly. (2011). *Shades of people*.
New York: Holiday House.

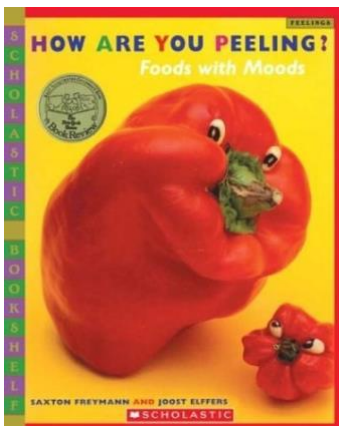
Books about food and feelings



Zeckhausen, D., & Boyd, B. (2008). *Full mouse, empty mouse: A tale of food and feelings*. Washington, DC: Magination Press.

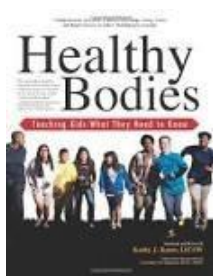


MacLean, k. (2009). *Moody cow meditates*. Somerville: Wisdom Publications.

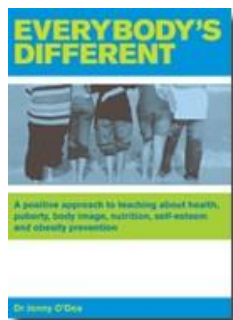


Freymann, S., & Elffers, J. (1999). *How are you peeling? Foods with moods*. New York: Arthur A. Levine Books.

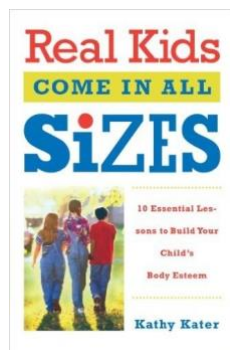
Reference books for educators



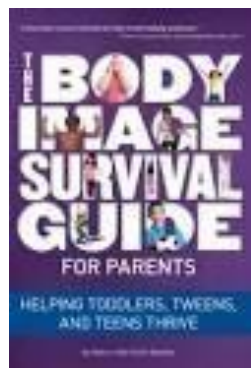
Kater, K. (2012). *Healthy Bodies; Teaching Kids What They Need to Know: A Comprehensive Curriculum to Address Body Image, Eating, Fitness and Weight Concerns in Today's Challenging Environment* (Volume 3). New York: Body Image Health



O'Dea, J.A. (2007). *Everybody's different: A positive approach to teaching about health, puberty, body image, nutrition, self-esteem and obesity prevention*. Sydney: University of Sydney Press.



Kater, K. (2004) *Real kids come in all sizes*. New York: Broadway Books.



Warhaft-Nadler, M. (2013). *The Body Image Survival Guide for Parents: Helping Toddlers, Tweens, and Teens Thrive*.

Germany: Eifrig Publishing.

Links to online materials

BODY IMAGE:

<https://butterfly.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/EDAA-Conversation->

Starter_updated-1.pdf

<https://kidshelpline.com.au/teens/issues/body-image>

kidshealth.org/teen/food_fitness/problems/body_image.html

www.healthyactive.gov.au

<https://au.reachout.com/challenges-and-coping/body-image>

<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/body-image-tips-for-parents>

<http://www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetails.aspx?p=243&np=293&id=2248>

<https://www.common sense media.org/lists/books-that-promote-a-healthy-body-image>

<https://psychcentral.com/health/ways-to-help-others-improve-their-body-image>

<http://www.amightygirl.com/blog?p=1757>

<http://blogs.psychcentral.com/weightless/2011/11/7-of-my-favorite-books-on-body-image/>

TEASING AND BULLYING:

<https://bullyingnoway.gov.au/teaching-about-bullying>

MEDIA

<http://mediasmarts.ca/digital-media-literacy/media-issues/body-image>

<https://mediasmart.uk.com/body-image-advertising-11-14yrs/>

<https://www.common sense media.org/blog/5-ways-parents-of-preschoolers-can-raise-a-body-positive-kid>

MINDFULNESS

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sarah-rudell-beach-/8-ways-to-teach-mindfulness-tokids_b_5611721.html