

## Grades 6-8 TEACHER NOTES Self-esteem

### What is Self-esteem?

Self-esteem is about how we value ourselves - the image we have of ourselves measured against what we think we should be. Many attributes can contribute to feelings of self-esteem including talents, intellectual abilities, sports abilities, interests, social skills, the ability to help others and physical appearance.

Beliefs and attitudes about ourselves that affect our self-esteem are learned from birth. Our self-esteem determines how valuable, lovable, worthwhile and competent we feel. The good news is that self-esteem can be developed. Children can be taught skills to help them build positive self-esteem.

### Self-esteem and Body Image

Self-esteem and body image are intimately linked. People who have positive self-esteem tend to have a healthy body image. People who lack self-esteem tend to have a poor body image. Children in the process of becoming adolescents are in transition, a period typically characterized by confusion and a decrease in self-esteem. During this period, self-esteem tends to be especially influenced by body image and perceptions of physical appearance.

Young girls are particularly vulnerable to a decrease in self-esteem as a result of society's emphasis on beauty and pressures to be thin. Body image is also a growing concern in boys who are increasingly faced with excessively muscular or extreme waif-like portrayals of male bodies in the media. Teachers and parents can make a significant contribution to the development of healthy attitudes and habits.

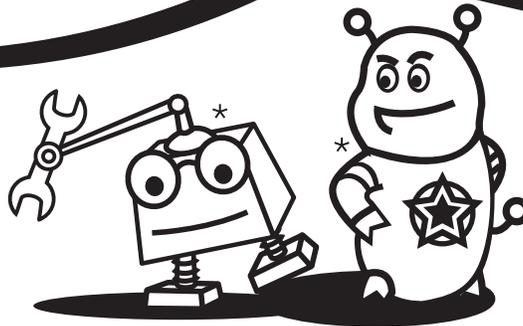
### Building Positive Self-esteem

Self-esteem is learned not inherited. The key to building positive self-esteem is to help students develop a well-rounded self-concept that encompasses many personal attributes and focuses on much more than physical appearance. It is important not to reinforce body shape or size as a measure of self-esteem. Focus on emphasizing students' many qualities and helping them develop competence in a variety of areas including education, work, sports or physical activity, personal interests, hobbies and clubs, community service and relationships.

### How to Boost Students' Self-esteem:

- ☆ Set them up for success.
- ☆ Provide positive feedback.
- ☆ Show you have confidence in them.
- ☆ Focus on the positive.
- ☆ Help them feel important.

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(continued)



**Beware of Gender Biases**

Despite advances in gender equity over the years, girls and boys are socialized differently. Girls are often judged by how they look whereas boys tend to be judged according to how they perform. As a result, the attributes that tend to influence self-esteem are different for girls and boys. Girls' self-esteem is often linked to physical appearance, whereas boys' self-esteem is more likely to be linked to talents and abilities.

Entering adolescence, girls' body shapes and sizes typically develop away from the thin body they perceive as ideal. While boys' body shapes and sizes tend to move toward the highly muscular body that they perceive as ideal. All too often, as children go through puberty, their self-esteem becomes linked to unrealistic perceptions about ideal body shape and size. This can lead to unhealthy eating and activity behaviours. A healthy body image will discourage the development of unhealthy habits such as dieting, excessive exercising or steroid use.

**Building A Healthy Body Image**

A healthy body image means having a healthy attitude towards your own body and accepting who you are. Body image development is based on interactions with the people and the world around us. Teachers and parents play key roles in helping girls and boys develop healthy attitudes and habits for life.

You can foster healthy body image by helping students develop positive self-esteem. This involves recognizing their many positive characteristics. Students will also benefit from learning to be aware of unrealistic images in the media and accepting that healthy bodies come in many different shapes and sizes.

**Developing Media Awareness**

Learning to be aware of unrealistic and extreme images in the mass media can make a difference in how students feel about their bodies and view themselves and others. Young girls and women living in Canada face constant pressure from the media and society to conform to a thin ideal. Boys and men are increasingly faced with images of overly muscular or very thin men as well.

**A Wonderful World of Differences**

Children need to know that healthy bodies come in many different shapes and sizes with different abilities. The diversity in body sizes and shapes is affected by genetic, biological and cultural factors. Understanding this diversity helps children respect and value the differences among all of us. Children who learn to accept and respect diversity in people's appearance are better able to love their own bodies for what they are and are more likely to take good care of themselves.

You can help students understand the developmental changes that happen in their growing bodies as they go through puberty. Understanding diversity is especially important at this time, since children naturally grow and develop at very different rates.