

Examining Ideas About Body Image

Grade Level: 6, 7, 8

Subject(s): Health/Chronic Conditions/Eating Disorders

Duration: 60 - 75 minutes

Description: Anorexia and bulimia are eating disorders that affect nearly 1 million American teens. Determinants include poor self-concept, body shape and size, perceptions about physical attraction, and depression. Dieting is associated with cycles of weight loss and regains that stress body systems. Dieting to lose weight is practiced most frequently in young women, most of who are within normal weight. This exercise originated from a request for assistance from a middle school teacher who observed female students purging after lunch. This lesson plan has been effectively used since 1993.

Goals:

1. To assist students in realistically assessing their body image and weight management practices as part of school health education classes.
2. To dispel myths of "ideal body types." This instruction should be part of a planned, coordinated school health program.

Objectives:

1. Students will illustrate personal perceptions of actual and preferred body types.
2. Students will correctly identify the social origins of ideal body types.
3. Students will discuss the dangers of adhering to unrealistic eating and exercise habits.
4. Students will present ideas to dispel misconceptions about body size and shape and reduce dependence on: extreme weight loss measures.

Provide a chapter(s) on nutrition in the middle school health text. Encourage students to consider personal health practices related to nutrition and weight control. Lead a class discussion beginning with eliciting students' responses to two open-ended statements:

1. All overweight people are...
2. All underweight people are...

Present a brief lecture on sensible eating and prevention of obesity. Describe sample weight loss products and services using printed and videotaped ads selected from a variety of publications and programs. Discuss the health dangers of misuse of these products.

Establish ground rules for participation in the activity:

1. Each student is free to participate, or to sit quietly.
2. Each student's personal health beliefs and opinions are important.
3. No one will criticize or censure another person.

Instruct students to individually prepare a drawing of an ideal man or woman, illustrating their own gender. On the back side of the paper, each student should draw real or average body types for a man or woman. Those who are uncomfortable with drawings may select to write adjectives to describe ideal and real body types.

Use the 10 Thought Questions to Guide Student Discussion about Weight Control and Eating Disorders: 1. What differences did you notice between your first and second drawings?

2. What was the most difficult part of completing these drawings or narrative?
3. What characteristics did you draw that were unrealistic for most people you know?
4. Where do we learn about body image and attractiveness?
5. How can you identify myths about body size and shape?
6. What is unhealthy about female and male media models?
7. What are the dangers of an over-emphasis on appearance and thinness?
8. What are the dangers of using commercial weight loss products?
9. What can be done to help people think about healthy body shape and size?
10. What have you learned from this exercise?

Don't limit student responses to these questions; rather use the Guide to stimulate discussion. Provide a list of school and community resources for nutrition and weight loss information and treatment of eating disorders. Invite the school guidance counselor to assist you in presenting this lesson and responding to students' concerns about eating disorders.

Assessment: Active participation in class discussion on nutrition practices and disordered eating. Completion of drawings/narrative illustrating ideal and real body types.