

PROMOTING A SAFE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

There are a number of ways schools can attempt to prevent eating disorders and poor body image among its students; any one of which is a great start.

- All faculty members are role models to their students. If students overhear their teachers criticizing their own bodies or observe them adhering to the newest fad diet, it reinforces this behavior in the students. Encourage faculty to explore their thoughts about their own bodies and behaviors surrounding food and exercise.
- Provide professional development/training to teachers, coaches, and other school personnel and leaders of student activities on eating disorders.
- Teach parents about eating disorders. Hold workshops or seminars for parents at school. Develop print materials to be distributed to parents, being sure to include materials in other languages. Be aware of cultural differences among families and address parents in the context of these differences.
- Do not tolerate teasing of any kind. Just as it is inappropriate and unkind to make a racial or religious slur, the same is true for body size and shape. You may want to consider developing a school policy to enforce a “teasing free” environment. This policy may include a creed to be displayed in each classroom and/or a list of consequences for any student found teasing on school grounds.
- Avoid displaying the calorie or fat content in meals served at school. This may exacerbate someone’s pre-existing inclination to obsess about calories and fat grams and set him/her up to ignore their hunger for fear of gaining weight. Promote staying active as a way for students to live healthier lives instead of eating low-calorie or low-fat.
- Attempt to provide as many food choices as possible in the cafeteria. Some options may include a soup and salad bar, deli, pasta bar, fruit stand and/or ice cream machine.
- Balance out vending and soda machines by ensuring that fruits, juices and other healthy alternatives are offered at the machines.
- Re-evaluate whether or not your students have adequate time in which to eat. If possible, incorporate snack times during the school day.
- Refrain from weighing your students or subjecting them to body fat analysis. It can be especially embarrassing and hurtful to an adolescent to have his/her weight and body fat publicly monitored. If these practices are mandatory at your school, they should be done in private and the results kept confidential.
- Posters or pictures displayed in your school should be representative of all body sizes and shapes.

- Create a resource area in which basic information on nutrition, body image and eating disorders as well as a referral directory of where professional help is available.
- Make media literacy fun! Create a bulletin board in a common area where students are invited to post their favorite (and least favorite) advertisements.
- Incorporate materials on nutrition, fitness, self-esteem, body image and eating disorders in the curriculum. Include these topics in health class, starting at the elementary level. Consider an interdisciplinary approach using science, social studies and computer courses to introduce related themes to reinforce the key concepts of healthy living.
- Form a body image support group, so teens can discuss the pressures to look a certain way.
- Develop partnerships with women's organizations and other nonprofits to provide materials and resources on eating disorders prevention, such as the Multi-service Eating Disorder Association.

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