

## **Body Image – Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Q. My child thinks that they are fat and doesn't like the way they look. How can I help them achieve a positive body image?**

It is difficult; support children to recognize that we come in all shapes and sizes, and to value characteristics that are not related to appearance.

Encourage children to have a healthy body weight by supporting them to eat to appetite, avoid labeling food as 'good' or 'bad', comfort children with attention, listening and hugs instead of food, and encourage regular meals.

Sometimes children may be bullied because of their size or shape; weight loss is not the answer - bullying is never acceptable

### **Q. How can I help a child to appreciate that people can be healthy at all different shapes and sizes?**

Promote critical consumer skills by both increasing the awareness of the messages that media conveys about unrealistic and unachievable body size ideals, and by reducing exposure to the media

Discourage the belief that losing weight will improve self-confidence and avoid negative comments towards others about their appearance

### **Q. What can I do to help parents and carers promote a positive body image to children in their care?**

Help them to promote an active lifestyle, with an emphasis on enjoyment and encourage parents/carers to show no preference toward thinness in front of a child

Ask them to listen to the child's concerns about their body and avoid criticizing their own appearance in front of a child.

### **Q. I see a lot of influence on children from the media. How can we stop this?**

Parents and carers, and childcare workers can try to counteract negative messages in the media by limiting the exposure children have to media which promotes a certain body type as the ideal, and instead offer more age appropriate media. Explaining that some images in the media may be digitally altered can help, and talking more about qualities of people in the media which are not linked to their appearance

### **Q. What if a child's weight is affecting their day to day health?**

If a child has their weight measured by a health professional, and it is well above or well below the growth centiles, a conversation about what might be influencing weight can take place.

A pursuit of weight loss (dieting) is not recommended as it is most likely to lead to weight gain in the longer term.

**Q. Children often feel excluded from activities due to their size. How can we help them be more involved?**

Similar to larger adults, bigger children may fear judgement and embarrassment when accessing services. Attention should be given to these concerns and appropriate measures taken to make all services weight inclusive.

Encouraging a positive body image by praising a child for non-appearance based strengths will help them to feel better about them self.