



Connecting Bodies, Hearts, and Minds; Teaching Kids to CARE, not *compare*

From the **Healthy Bodies** curriculum

Kids Need “Antidotes” to Resist Toxic Cultural Myths Today

To develop healthy body esteem today, kids need “antidotes” to challenge toxic cultural myths that encourage weight bias, body dissatisfaction, poor and disordered eating and fitness habits, and weight concerns.

Challenge myths promoting size over substance: *“How I look” or “what I weight” is more important than “who I am.” A slim body or “normal” BMI is essential for the “right” appearance and for health.*

Help students to resist body objectification and comparisons to external standards. Help them:

- Acquire historical perspective on today’s body image attitudes and weight standards. Comparisons to external criteria for appearance or health are a recipe for unhappiness, internalized stigma, and poorer self-care.
- Become media-literate. Think critically about media messages that objectify bodies and promote the “right size/wrong size” mentality.
- Develop a strong sense of identity based on *inner* qualities and positive choices, rather than outcomes that are not in their power to control in the long run.

Challenge myths that deny biological diversity: *Anyone can be slim if they work at it. Fatter people eat too much, and/or are not active. Fat is bad/wrong.*

Teach students basic biological principals. Help them:

- Understand the facts of genetic diversity. There are many complex contributors to size, shape and weight that are built-in and outside of our power to control.
- Be prepared for the normal, biologically “wired” changes in body fat composition that occur during puberty and other developmental stages of life.
- Recognize the limits to external control over weight through sustainable, healthy means. The internal weight regulatory system is influenced by many complex factors that are not ours to choose. It is presumptuous and prejudicial to judge a person’s lifestyle by his or her appearance or weight.

Challenge myths that deny the universal and negative effects of externally prescribed hunger regulation: *Dieting is an effective weight-loss strategy.*

Teach students the facts about dieting for weight loss:

- Recognize there are predictable, counterproductive results when hunger is not satisfied. Long term studies show over 90% of weight lost through dieting is regained and 1/2 to 2/3 of dieters regain added pounds.

Challenge myths that discount health as a value and that encourage complacency about choices that do not result in the desired look: *“Eat, drink, and be merry!” Healthy choices for health’s sake are too much work.*

Help children of every size to value and focus on health and well-being instead of size:

- Eat well. Listen to and satisfy hunger completely with a balanced variety of good tasting, wholesome food that provides the nutrients and energy their body’s needs.
- Be embodied, enjoy movement, and make movement a priority. Spend enough time and energy engaged in physical activity to maintain their body's fitness level throughout life.
- Accept the diverse, healthy sizes and shapes that result from mindful self-care. Look for role models that help them to feel good about who they are inside and out. Reject “ideals” that promote weight-bias and stigma.