

Positive Self Image

Kicking Things Off With a Healthy Self-Image



The beliefs and attitudes we have about ourselves are learned from birth. Therefore, it is important to understand the role that parents and early learning and child care professionals play in helping children build self-esteem and a positive self-image, including the role of physical activity!

Let's Start by *bouncing around* some definitions and theories...

Self-image describes how an individual perceives his or her characteristics and abilities and how an individual evaluates him/herself. Self-image is complex and develops gradually as an individual matures and interacts with others. Part of what influences self-image is self-esteem.

Self-esteem is an emotion and is defined as the feeling of self-worth. It determines how valuable, lovable, worthwhile and competent we feel we are based on: relationships with parents, peers and significant others, talents, interests, physical/athletic ability, physical appearance, and intellectual and academic abilities. It is the picture we have of ourselves measured against what we think we should be. While self-image and self-esteem are used interchangeably, most of the literature refers to self-esteem.

A word about body image

Body image is the mental picture an individual has of his or her body - what it looks like in the mirror and what he or she thinks it looks like to others. Body image plays a part in forming one's self-image, and can affect self-esteem.

Beginning at birth, body image development is based on interactions with the people and world around us. Therefore, early learning and child care professionals and parents are key to helping children develop healthy attitudes for life. Body image is shaped by a number of factors including judgemental comments from others, harassment, stigmatization, media influence, social values, how the individual feels, and any conditions of the body such as illness or disabilities. According to the National Eating Disorders Information Centre (www.nedic.ca),

from as early as age four, girls know the importance placed on body image. At age four, they have an understanding of physical shapes; by age five they prefer certain figures, and by age six, girls develop negative feelings regarding large types.

Children need to know that healthy bodies come in many different shapes and sizes and have different abilities so that they will respect and value people's differences. Accepting that everyone is different will help children accept and love their own bodies. Having a healthy body image fosters positive self-esteem, and vice versa. You can foster both by helping children to recognise their **many** positive characteristics, not just those related to their outward appearance.

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The Role of Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is the foundation of psychological well-being. Young people with high self-esteem tend to be less anxious, withdrawn, and pessimistic about their abilities. The research indicates they are less susceptible to interpersonal problems, conforming to social pressure, poor body image, and eating disorders.

Building Positive Self-image and Self-esteem involves:

- Providing nurturing, safe and loving environments for children
- Helping each child develop a well-rounded self-concept by emphasizing his/her many qualities and personal attributes
- Helping children develop competence in a variety of areas including education, sports or physical activity, personal interests, and hobbies
- Avoiding the focus on body shape or size as a measure of self-esteem
- Setting children up for success and helping them feel important
- Providing positive feedback
- Showing you have confidence in them and focusing on the positive
- Being aware of self-esteem gender biases – a girl's self-esteem is often linked to physical appearance, whereas a boy's self-esteem is more likely to be linked to talents and abilities
- Being positive about yourself and accepting compliments that point out your strengths and abilities. Give compliments in the same way to the children
- Avoiding the use of criticism when a child makes a mistake. Use it, instead, as a learning experience. When a child does something wrong, make it clear that you dislike the behaviour, but you still care about the child
- Listening carefully, without judging
- Respecting people's differences and recognizing their strengths and accomplishments.



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Physical Activity and Self-esteem

- According to the Ontario Physical and Health Education Association (OPHEA), there is a strong connection between motor competence and self-esteem among very young children. While adults base feelings about themselves on their physical, social, family, personal, school/work, and moral-ethical experiences, the very young child is most likely to evaluate him/herself based on family and physical experiences. For example, when a child says “watch me” to a parent or early childhood educator, s/he is often demonstrating his/her ability to perform a physical skill.
- The President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports indicates that positive self-esteem is achieved through perceived competence in and social support for physical activity, which in turn enhances enjoyment and continued participation.
- A child perceives competence in physical activity by his/her ability to perform simple tasks (such as making contact with the ball), trying hard, learning a new athletic skill, enjoyment of the activity, and receiving positive feedback and reinforcement from parents and teachers.
- Parents and teachers can influence a child’s perceptions of physical competence by providing physical activity opportunities, giving positive feedback and reinforcement, and modeling appropriate physical activity behaviours themselves.
- In general, studies show that physical activity influences self-esteem as it:
 - helps decrease feelings of anxiety, tension and depression
 - is related to a general sense of optimism and contributes to feelings of well-being
 - is an avenue for expression of anger, aggression and happiness
 - is a means for self-discovery and social interaction
 - positively influences academic achievement, creativity, and problem-solving
 - improves self-discipline
 - improves fitness levels which are related to positive mental health
 - has a positive impact on behaviour and healthy lifestyle choices in later years, such as the decision to smoke, drink alcohol and take drugs.

When providing physical activity opportunities for children, be sure to:

- Make them fun
- Keep them free of negative pressure
- Keep them interesting
- Set small but achievable goals
- Incorporate activities that emphasize basic motor skill development, such as running, rolling, climbing, throwing, catching, and kicking
- Plan the activity in short bursts with frequent breaks

Have a Ball with Physical Activity



Daily physical activity is a great way to promote fun while establishing an active lifestyle that will keep kids healthy, well...thy, and wise!

As professionals in the early learning and child care sector, you, along with parents, play a significant and important role in providing children with skills and experiences that will influence and impact their long-term success. Success can be measured not just by a person's education and career path, but by their contribution to society, their health and happiness. There is an abundance of research that demonstrates the important role that physical activity plays in contributing to success in all of these areas.

Regular physical activity scores:

Health Benefits

- Increases energy and improves stamina
- Encourages muscle growth and helps develop strong bones
- Helps maintain a healthy weight
- Makes the heart and lungs stronger
- Improves flexibility and coordination
- Helps improve sleeping and eating habits

Psychosocial Benefits

- Helps us feel good about ourselves
- Provides opportunities to socialize and make friendships
- Provides opportunities to develop motor/sports skills and life skills
- May provide children who struggle academically with other opportunities to experience success, thereby contributing to the development of positive self-esteem
- Presents opportunities to practice self-discipline
- Reduces anxiety and depression
- Improves one's ability to deal with stress
- Decreases the likelihood of using tobacco, alcohol and drugs in the teen years and beyond
- Develops positive lifelong attitudes toward physical activity
- Encourages healthy family engagement

Academic Benefits

- Helps with language skills and concepts, and appropriate application of labels. For example, learning the difference between near and far, left and right, over and under, front and behind and above and below. They also learn about speed, distance, height, shape, colour, direction, and position. As children move, the words take on new meaning to them. It is also necessary for letter identification and the orientation of symbols on a page: the only difference between a small "b" and a small "d" depends upon orientation to the side of the circle the line is on
- May aid in the development of certain perceptual attributes. Visual-motor coordination is important to accurate hand movement for writing and drawing
- Improves motor task proficiency, fitness and sports skills resulting in increased academic performance
- Helps children speak and listen to one another. When they invent games on the playground, they're using their vocabulary and learning important lessons in communication. When they invent rules for those games they further enhance communication skills
- Helps increase concentration, memory, creativity, and problem-solving skills/abilities and enhances learning

Children who have not developed basic movement skills to a point where they are experiencing success are less likely to choose to be physically active. The best time for basic movement skill development is during the early years.

Have a Ball with Physical Activity

Despite the amazing number of benefits accrued through daily physical activity, over half of our children and youth are not active enough for healthy growth and development.

- Children today are 40% less active than they were 30 years ago.
- Forty percent of Canadian children have already developed at least one risk factor for heart disease – reduced fitness due to inactivity.
- In 2002, Ontarians aged two and up spent almost 21 hours a week watching TV. Children between the ages of two and 11 specifically, watched an average of 14.5 hours a week. This did not include time spent playing video and computer games or using the Internet.
- The amount of time spent playing video games by Canadian children is among the highest in the world.
- In Canada, the increasing prevalence of obesity is the fastest growing epidemic of our time. Between 1981 and 1996, there were dramatic increases in overweight and obesity in children aged seven to 13.
- Type II diabetes, once known as “adult-onset diabetes” is an increasingly serious problem among children and adolescents. It is closely linked with both obesity and physical inactivity.

“Because of the increasing rates of obesity, unhealthy eating habits, and physical inactivity, we may see the first generation that will be less healthy and have a shorter life expectancy than their parents”.

(United States Surgeon General)

How Active Should Young Children Be?

While no Canadian recommendations currently exist for children from birth to age five, the National Association for Sport and Physical Education in the United States has produced Guidelines for infants (birth to 12 months), toddlers (12 to 36 months), and preschoolers (3 to 5 years).

Summary of the guidelines

Infants should:

- explore their environment and not have their movement restricted for prolonged periods of time
- develop movement skills and perform large muscle activities through daily interaction with parents and/or caregivers
- be placed in safe settings that facilitate physical activity.

Toddlers should:

- accumulate at least 30 minutes of daily structured physical activity
- engage in at least 60 minutes and up to several hours daily of unstructured physical activity and not be sedentary for more than 60 minutes at a time except when sleeping
- develop movement skills that are building blocks for more complex movement tasks
- have indoor and outdoor areas that meet or exceed recommended safety standards for performing large muscles activities.

Preschoolers should:

- accumulate at least 60 minutes of daily structured physical activity
- engage in at least 60 minutes and up to several hours daily of unstructured physical activity and not be sedentary for more than 60 minutes at a time except when sleeping
- develop competence in movement skills that are building blocks for more complex movement tasks
- have indoor and outdoor areas that meet or exceed recommended safety standards for performing large muscles activities.

Individuals responsible for the well-being of infants, toddlers and preschoolers should be aware of the importance of physical activity and facilitate the child's movement skills.

For more information about Active Start: A Statement of Physical Activity Guidelines for Children Birth to Five Years, visit www.aahperd.org/naspe

Have a Ball with Physical Activity

Our Goal: Physical Activity for All Abilities



According to the Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability, one of the greatest barriers to accessibility is the fear of “doing the wrong thing”. Here are some practical ideas for making games and activities accessible to all:

- Use lighter, softer, larger balls
- Choose shorter, lighter bats and racquets
- Choose larger goals or target areas
- Substitute beanbags for balls
- Partially deflate balls for dribbling and kicking activities
- Substitute wheeling for running and rolling a ball off a lap for kicking
- Simplify games by having players drop the ball and catch it rather than asking that they bounce it consecutively
- Use props to help with skills. For example, use a towel to extend a player’s reach
- Use a smaller playing area to make it easier for all players to participate
- Lower the target or move it closer to the players

Ten Tips for *Having a Ball* with Young Children

1. Create an environment that supports physical activity. Include access to a playground; an outdoor space with toys and equipment; and an indoor space that is conducive to movement, including appropriate toys, equipment and dance music. Be sure that whether physical activity is taking place indoors or out, the environment is safe.
2. Be an active role model by participating in games, dancing, action songs and outdoor play.
3. Encourage parents to dress their child in comfortable clothing that doesn’t restrict his/her play and may get dirty.
4. Make physical activity part of the daily routine, just like lunch and nap time.
5. Display photos of the children being active. Put up posters depicting physical activity.
6. Provide equal opportunities for physical activity regardless of age, gender, language, ethnic background and ability. Use equipment that does not label by gender, such as balls, hoops, beanbags, etc. Use cooperative games that do not exclude anyone or ask anyone to sit out for part of the game (e.g. tag, musical chairs). Avoid comparing children’s skills and abilities.
7. Promote positive self-image, self-esteem and personal control where all children feel successful. Build a child’s confidence in physical activity by using praise, encouragement and positive feedback. When a child is struggling with a particular activity or skill, encourage and work with them to improve that skill over time, rather than dismissing its importance.
8. Respect growth patterns and encourage physical activity at each stage, offering a variety of choices based on the needs, interests, and abilities of young children. Provide opportunities to learn basic motor skills that will enable them to participate in different lifetime physical activities.
9. Keep activities enjoyable and non-threatening. Emphasize fun rather than competition, and winning and losing.
10. Offer a variety of structured and non-structured active play. Provide young children with opportunities for physical activity throughout the day that includes walking, throwing and kicking, dancing, gardening, and other ideas that the children may have.

Adapted from *Active Living for Early Childhood*, Sport and Recreation Division of the Nova Scotia Office of Health Promotion and Eastman, W. *Active Living; Physical Activities for Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers*. Early Childhood Education Journal, Vol. 24, No. 3, 1997.

Healthy Weights

Let's Not Drop the Ball When it Comes to Promoting Healthy Weights

For both children and adults, maintaining a healthy weight is vital to overall health and well-being. Yet, according to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2002), being overweight due to physical inactivity and poor nutrition is one of the greatest health challenges and risk factors for chronic disease in the 21st century. And in Canada, the increasing prevalence of obesity is the fastest growing epidemic of our time.

Did you know...

- In 2003, almost one out of every two Ontario adults was overweight or obese.
- Between 1981 and 1996, the prevalence of boys who were overweight increased from 15% to 28.8% and among girls from 15% to 23.6%.
- The prevalence of obesity in boys nearly tripled from 5% to 13.5% and more than doubled in girls from 5% to 11.8%.
- In 2000/2001, obesity cost Canada's healthcare system an estimated \$4.3 billion.
- For non-smokers, physical inactivity, poor nutrition and overweight are the leading causes of chronic health problems in Ontario today.
- In a population based sample, about 60% of obese children five to ten years of age had at least one risk factor for cardiovascular disease – such as high total cholesterol, insulin or blood pressure – and 25% had two or more risk factors.
- Children who are overweight or obese are at higher risk for several health problems including asthma, sleeping difficulties, bone and joint problems, type 2 diabetes, high cholesterol and blood lipid levels, high blood pressure, depression, low self esteem, poor body image, and discrimination by their peers.
- About 50% of obese children six years or older are likely to become obese adults, compared with 10% of children who are not obese. About 70% of obese adolescents are likely to become obese adults.
- Overweight and obesity into adulthood may lead to heart disease and stroke, osteoarthritis, some types of cancer (breast, colon, prostate and kidney), gallbladder disease, impaired fertility, and psychosocial problems.
- There is something we can do...

Prevention should be our goal!

Encouraging and instilling healthy lifestyle habits during the early years will likely be more successful than during the adult years. Since weight loss is more difficult to achieve once an adult is obese, preventing children from becoming obese is critical to their long-term health.

A word about body image

Body image is the mental picture an individual has of his or her body - what it looks like in the mirror and what he or she thinks it looks like to others. Body image plays a part in forming one's self-image, and can affect self-esteem. Children become aware of body shapes and sizes at a very early age. They see and hear things on TV, they learn from older siblings and friends, and they listen to you.

What can you do to encourage a healthy body image?

- Regardless of a child's weight, care about them unconditionally.
- Do not talk about dieting and do not make negative comments about your own body.
- Avoid using words such as "big", "skinny", "fat", "clumsy", "hippy".
- Discourage teasing and put-downs. Let children know that making comments about people's weight, shape or size is not acceptable.
- Praise children for how they behave, how they treat others and what they can accomplish, rather than how they look.
- Encourage children to focus on their abilities rather than on their appearance. Help them identify things they like about themselves.
- Teach children that people come in all shapes, weights, sizes and colours.

Healthy Weights

Let's Not Drop the Ball When it Comes to Promoting Healthy Weights



Energy Balance ... a juggling act!

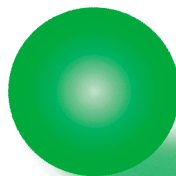
As a society, we have lost the balance between the energy we take in and the energy we expend, which is a key to a healthy weight. Just when Ontarians are faced with more food choices, more processed foods, and large food portions, we have engineered physical activity out of our lives, replacing it with remote controls, computers and video games.

(Dr. S. Basrur, 2004, CMOH Report Healthy Weights, Healthy Lives)

A person's weight is determined by the energy they take in (the calories in the food they eat) and the energy they put out (the calories expended). When people consistently take in more food energy than they burn each day (through physical activity, as well as the body's daily use of energy to sustain life, such as pumping blood, breathing, and digestion), they will gain weight. A number of factors also affect body weight including biological, social, economic, cultural, and environmental factors. As an early learning or child care professional, here's how you can promote healthy weights through the provision of physical activity and healthy eating opportunities

Physical Activity

- Educate children and parents about the importance of daily physical activity.
- Ensure that toddlers and preschoolers participate in daily structured physical activity, accumulating at least 30 and 60 minutes respectively. Furthermore, toddlers and preschoolers should engage in at least 60 minutes and up to several hours per day of unstructured physical activity, and should not be sedentary for more than 60 minutes at a time except when sleeping.
- Encourage infants to explore their environment, develop movement skills and perform large muscle activities. Avoid restricting their movement for prolonged periods of time.
- Promote activities that use large muscle groups and encourage movement of the whole body (e.g. walking, dancing).
- Ensure that the children participate in vigorous forms of physical activity such as running, dancing, chasing a ball, and jumping.
- Build physical activity into other aspects of the program. Do arts and crafts that require the children to move around, act out stories or songs, walk around the block.
- Make physical activity a daily part of the program.
- Host physical activity events such as "Walk-to-Child Care Centre" week, fund-raising events (Terry Fox walk), Sneaker Day, etc.
- See *Have a Ball with Physical Activity* in this Toolkit for more tips on getting children active.

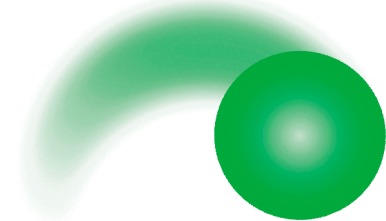


Healthy Weights

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Healthy Eating

- Serve healthy snacks including vegetables and fruit, yogurt, cheese, cereal, and whole grain bread and substitute healthy snacks such as veggies and dip for chips and dip.
- Provide water and milk to children and limit drinks with added sugars such as soft drinks, fruit drinks and sport drinks. 100% juice is a healthy choice for children but should still be limited to one-50 to 125 ml serving per day.
- Do not use food as a reward and avoid withholding food as a consequence of undesirable behaviour.
- Talk about food in a positive way and reinforce the health benefits it provides, such as "drinking milk makes your bones strong".
- Involve children in planning and preparing meals and snacks.
- Promote healthy fundraising initiatives and limit those that sell cookie dough, doughnuts, chocolates, etc.
- Encourage parents to send healthy meals and snacks with their children. For ideas, visit www.dietitians.ca.
- Become familiar with *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating* and *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating – Focus on Preschoolers*, available through your local Public Health Unit or through Health Canada by calling (613) 954-5995, or by writing to Publications, Health Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0K9, or by visiting www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hpfb-dgpsa/onpp-bppn/food_guide_preschoolers_e.html.



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