

HELPING KIDS *develop a positive body image*

Our body image is the idea we have of our appearance, i.e., how we see ourselves. Although 80% of youth have a normal body weight, over 60% are **dissatisfied** with their body image and want to change their weight. Over 50% of girls want to be thinner and over 25% of boys would like to be more muscular.

WHY TAKE ACTION?

Because body image dissatisfaction affects physical and mental health

Physical health

Dissatisfaction with one's body image leads to harmful behaviours such as skipping meals, dieting, overtraining or loss of interest in physical activities. These behaviours can lead to vitamin and mineral deficiencies, dehydration, growth delays and long-term weight issues.

Mental health

In a society where thinness is a measure of a person's worth, young people naturally base their self-esteem on their weight and appearance. This can quickly become a negative obsession, which manifests as a **loss of overall well-being**, with symptoms of depression, stress and anxiety. Body image dissatisfaction can lead to chronic dieting, food obsessions and, ultimately, anorexia and bulimia.

MANY FACTORS CAN CAUSE BODY IMAGE DISSATISFACTION

A context of vulnerability — Adolescence is a period of major change and vulnerability during which young people are extremely sensitive to social pressure. It is a crucial period in the development of self-esteem. Since teenagers have not yet developed their critical thinking skills, body ideals can have an enormous influence on them.

Social pressure — We live in a world in which it is considered normal and desirable to strive for a unique, stereotypical standard of beauty: a young, thin body for women and a muscular body for men. It has become normal to go on a diet or work out at the gym in order to attain this ideal. In this regard, **the messages and actions of those who are close to young people—including peers, parents, educators, teachers and coaches—have a considerable influence.**

Industries setting the standard — The dieting, fashion and advertising industries and the media (TV, film, magazines) promote social norms focused on a unique beauty standard, a cult of the body and an obsession with being thin. **These norms play a decisive role in the development of a positive or negative body image.**



EXAMPLES OF ACTIONS

DAYCARES AND CHILDCARE SETTINGS

- Support educators in their reflections on their own body image.
- Hold information and awareness-raising sessions for parents and educators on key food attitudes and practices during early childhood, in collaboration with the regional health department.

SCHOOLS AND AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

- Implement educational programs such as *Bien dans sa tête, bien dans sa peau* (ÉquiLibre), and *Leader Académie, les 3^e cycle se prononcent* (Dairy Farmers of Canada).
- Participate in the *Ton influence a du poids* campaign and read the blog on the ÉquiLibre site *Derrière le miroir*.
- Get young people to participate in special projects such as *Estime-toi*, by photographer Véronique Côté, and initiatives related to the Quebec charter for a healthy and realistic body image, developed by the Ministère de la Culture, des Communications et de la Condition féminine.
- Inform parents, facilitators and coaches through promotional activities, in collaboration with the regional health department.
- Provide teachers, educators, youth facilitators and those involved in sports and recreation activities with training focused on body image, such as *Intervenir sur le poids et l'image corporelle à l'adolescence* (ÉquiLibre).
- Offer high school teachers training on how to implement the *Bien dans sa tête, bien dans sa peau* program (ÉquiLibre).

COMMUNITY GROUPS AND ASSOCIATIONS

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MUNICIPALITIES

- Provide those involved in sports and recreation activities with training focused on body image, such as *Intervenir sur le poids et l'image corporelle à l'adolescence* (ÉquiLibre).
- Incorporate communication campaigns into public events (e.g., *Ton influence a du poids* (ÉquiLibre), which invites young people to question standard beauty ideals and to actively participate in changing social norms).
- Publicly recognize positive initiatives, for example by participating in the vote for the IMAGE/in prize (ÉquiLibre) and recognizing the finalists and winners as agents of change.

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