



PROMOTING POSITIVE BODY IMAGE

A Resource for Educators

This resource can be used to promote healthy body image and positive relationships with food for students. It also offers tips and resources to guide staff in addressing weight-based bullying and offers advice on what to do if they are concerned about a student's eating.

WAYS TO SUPPORT HEALTH AND EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

using a [Comprehensive School Health Approach](#):

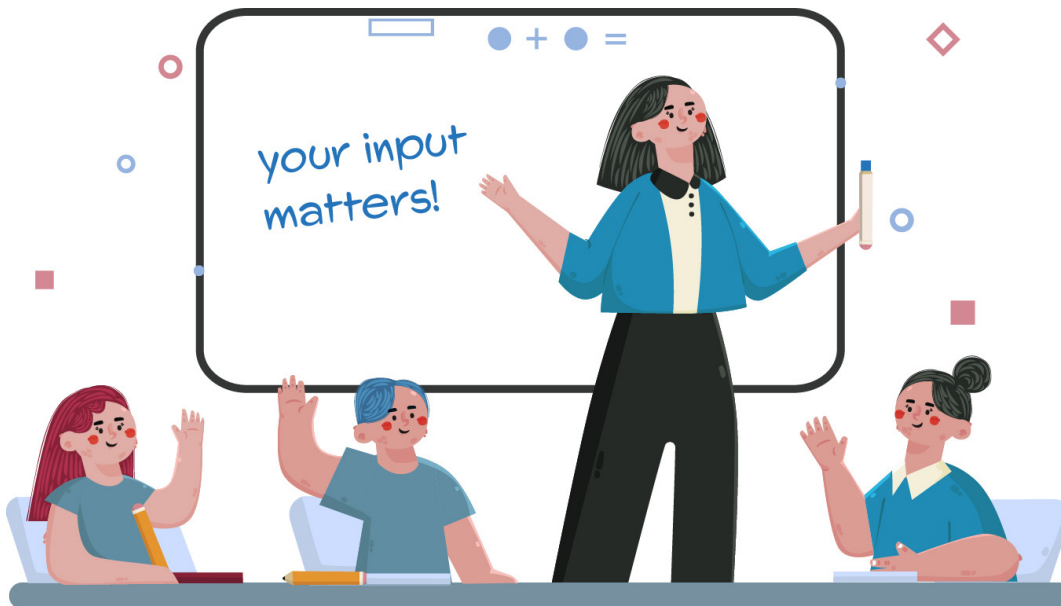
Social & Physical Environments:

- Use body diverse visuals in the classroom (resources, handouts, posters).
- Remove scales.
- [Avoid comments around dieting, weight or body shape](#) (yourself or others).
- Schedule adequate time for eating (minimum 20 minutes) as per school meal and snack program recommendations ([Student Nutrition Program Guidelines](#)).
- Create safe environments during mealtimes without comments about food choices or consumption.
- Ensure desks and chairs fit all bodies.
- Talk about all foods neutrally (e.g., no good or bad foods). Practice describing foods based on their colour, shape, smell, flavour, and texture rather than perceived nutritional value.
- Create a school culture where students (and adults) of all body shapes and sizes, genders, ethnicities, and sexual orientation have a safe, inclusive space and feel connected to their school.

Curriculum, Teaching & Learning:

- When teaching about health, disconnect weight from health. Instead, focus on adequate sleep, physical activity, self-compassion, self-regulation, and mindful eating.
- Ensure lesson plans and student assignments do not include food logs, calorie counting, and weighing of students.
- Frame physical activity as fun and social, not as a way to control weight. Support diverse exposure to types of physical activity (i.e., dancing, hiking, yoga, intra-murals, recess, class sports).
- Encourage critical thinking skills around social media related to food/weight/body shape.
- Normalize increase in weight, body fat, and appetite during growth and puberty.
- Encourage exploring foods, where they come from, and ways they are enjoyed, opposed to categorization of foods.
- Do not take away gym or recess as a form of punishment. Exercise is a normal part of living, not a reward.





WAYS TO SUPPORT HEALTH AND EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

School & Classroom Leadership:

- Follow your board's anti-bullying policies
- [Choose non-food rewards and incentives for students.](#)
- Understand and communicate [meal supervision roles](#) to the whole school community through social media, school handbooks, and school policies.
- Support professional development opportunities for educators and staff to explore and reconsider their own definitions of health and well-being from a weight-neutral perspective.
- [Respect parents' roles in food selection.](#)
- Learn more about [food literacy](#) and its significant influence on eating patterns.

Home, School & Community Partnerships:

- Work and partner with professionals in the community (e.g., public health staff, registered dietitians, mental health organizations).
- Seek guest speakers that are weight-inclusive and/or trauma-informed.
- Know your board's internal referral pathway. If you are not sure connect with your school principal.
- [Refer to appropriate supports when disordered eating/eating disorders suspected](#)
- Maintain regular communication with parents/caregivers and share supportive resources: [Raising Kids with a Healthy Body Image.](#)
- Recognize that some messaging in Canada's Food Guide recommendations may not be supportive for students who are still learning how to eat a variety of foods and/or students who have limited access to food at home.

Student Engagement:

- Get input from students on activities and topics of interest.
- Create engaging learning experiences that promote collaboration, innovation, and creativity (e.g., develop and maintain a school garden).
- Use student food-preference surveys to help determine healthy foods to offer and/or sell at the school.
- Provide hands-on opportunities to grow, prepare and/or enjoy food together.
- Provide leadership opportunities for students to be involved in the development, organization, and implementation of school-based activities (e.g., organize and run a student-led tuck shop).



Northwestern
Health Unit

www.nwhu.on.ca



TEACHING TOOLS FOR EDUCATORS

Teach Food First

(Grades K-8)

Focuses on using a food exploration approach to nutrition education that has been linked with long-term, positive eating attitudes and behaviors. *(Ministry of Health, BC Centre for Disease Control, in partnership with public health dietitians, BC teachers, and Indigenous Knowledge Keepers)*

Amazing Me

(Grades 4-5)

Addresses media literacy, different aspects of bullying, and body confidence. *(The Dove Self-Esteem Project and Discovery Education)*

Beyond Images

(Grades 4-8)

Online lesson plans from Canada's National Eating Disorder Information Centre. (NEDIC)

Dove Confident Me

(Grades 5-8)

Designed to empower students to feel confident and reach their full potential. *(The Dove Self-Esteem Project, endorsed and promoted by Ophea)*

Media Smarts

(Grades K-12)

Canada's Centre for Digital and Media Literacy includes literacy programs, resources, and lesson plans with the purpose of encouraging youth to develop critical thinking skills when engaging with various forms of media.

Diet Culture: Recognise it, Reject it, Revise the Narrative!

Ontario Family Studies and Home Economics Educators Association (OFSHEEA)

Curriculum advisory resources for teachers to examine their own relationship to diet culture with the goal of removing it from our teaching and replacing it with more positive and inclusive approaches to addressing bodies and nutrition. Includes suggestions for curriculum expectations in HFN 10, HFN 20, HFA 4C, and HFA 4U.



Northwestern
Health Unit

www.nwhu.on.ca

TEACHING TOOLS FOR EDUCATORS

VIDEOS

[Dove Change One Thing](#)

(46 sec)

A short video highlighting appearance pressures – For grade 5 and up

[Poodle Science](#)

(2 min 49 sec)

An animated video discussing the limitations of current research on health and weight - For grade 7 and up

[50 People 1 Question](#)

(4 min 13 sec)

A video asking 50 people from diverse backgrounds what they would change about themselves - For all ages

[Dove Reverse Selfie](#)

(1 min)

A short video that can be used to address social media and retouching apps - For grade 6 and up

RESOURCES AND INFORMATION

[Mental Health and Weight Bias](#) ([French version](#))

Ontario Dietitians in Public Health (ODPH)

4-page resource developed for educators to address weight stigma in schools.

[Nurturing Healthy Eaters in...](#)

[Elementary Schools](#) ([French version](#))

[Secondary Schools](#) ([French version](#))

ODPH

1-page resource on how school community members can support students to nurture healthy eating.

[Raising Kids with a Healthy Body Image](#)

Jessie's Legacy

A short resource for parents on what influences body image and eating habits in youth, and how to create a supportive home environment.

[National Eating Disorder Information Centre](#)

(NEDIC)

NEDIC provides information, resources, referrals, and support to Canadians affected by eating disorders.

[Eating Disorders Ontario](#) (EDO)

Overview of Disordered Eating Prevention: How Can Schools Help?

EDO is a provincial program that supports clinicians and healthcare professionals to deliver services across Ontario for those with eating disorders, eating-related and body image issues for all ages.

[BrightBites](#)

BrightBites is a website that helps school communities improve their food environments and provides credible nutrition information and curriculum support for educators.

[Body Sense](#)

Website dedicated to fostering positive body image in male and female athletes to proactively prevent disordered eating and muscle dysmorphia – Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport and the True Sport Foundation.

This resource was developed and reviewed by health professionals and educators for the intended use of promoting a safe, weight inclusive, food neutral environment in school settings. If you are looking for local support on resources, curriculum or ideas, please reach out to NWHU dietitians at nutrition@nwhu.on.ca



**Northwestern
Health Unit**

www.nwhu.on.ca



GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOL STAFF

Helping a Student with a Suspected Eating Disorder

Disordered eating is common among youth and can go unnoticed for many months or years by parents, families, and school staff. Schools are often the entry point for recognition, early intervention, and treatment.

Early detection of disordered eating symptoms and accessing treatment are critical to healthy outcomes. [Eating disorders are serious, life-threatening mental illnesses with both physical and psychological symptoms.](#) The longer the disordered eating goes unnoticed, the greater the potential for it to develop into an eating disorder (e.g., anorexia or bulimia) and the longer it takes to recover.

Disordered eating and eating disorders do not discriminate. They affect all genders, body sizes, ethnicities, and sexual orientations. Staff should be aware that the student and/or the family might not recognize a problem or be willing to accept help. Denial is a symptom of eating disorders.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF DISORDERED EATING

The greater number of symptoms present, the greater the risk:

- Fainting, dizziness, light headedness, low energy
- Weight loss or fluctuations*
- Preoccupation with body and/or weight
- Reduced concentration, memory and thinking ability
- Mood changes – withdrawn, quiet, unhappy, irritable
- Depression, anxiety, social isolation, and loneliness
- Unusual eating rituals or changes in eating
- Drinking excessive amounts of water and/or tea
- Frequent trips to the bathroom
- Excessive exercise
- Decline in school attendance
- Perfectionism (e.g., towards schoolwork, extracurriculars, self-identity)
- Skipping meals and/or won't eat with others

**Disordered eating and eating disorders exist among all body shapes and sizes, not just smaller bodies.*



Northwestern
Health Unit

www.nwhu.on.ca



TALKING TO A STUDENT SHOWING SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF DISORDERED EATING

The goal of the discussion is NOT to provide a diagnosis but rather

- To listen, to express concern for the student's overall health and well-being, and to gain an understanding of the student's perspective.
- To demonstrate warmth, compassion, and care without judgement.
- To work with the student in involving the student's parents/guardians.
- To emphasize the importance of seeking medical care as soon as possible.
- To not comment on the student's weight loss or appearance.

Goals of informing the parent(s)/guardian(s)

- To share with parents your concerns regarding the student's health and wellbeing.
- To support parents in accessing medical care and resources to help their child.

Inform parents that you are concerned the student may be at risk of disordered eating. Tell parents that the earlier treatment begins, the better the chances are for a successful recovery.

NEXT STEPS

Refer to services

- Your school's administration or guidance councillor can help you find resources and make referrals.
- Student's family physician or a community physician/nurse practitioner.
- Contact FIREFLY. Services focus on responding to the diverse and often critical needs of families and communities by utilizing a wide range of physical, emotional, developmental and community services.

There are ways to support a student who is currently receiving treatment. Visit the NEDIC website for tips and suggestions on how to do that: <https://nedic.ca/help-for-someone-else/what-are-specific-considerations-for-educators/>

Resources and Information on Prevention, Identification, and Treatment

- [National Eating Disorder Information Centre \(NEDIC\)](#)
- [NWHU: Find a Dietitian in Northwestern Ontario](#)
- [Regional Inpatient Eating Disorder Treatment Facility: St. Joseph's Care Group](#) – Eating Disorders Programs

TAKE ACTION

Consult with a school counsellor / administrator if you see the above signs and symptoms.



Northwestern
Health Unit

www.nwhu.on.ca