We Respect Every Body

Our culture can place value on being a certain size, shape or appearance. We get messages from all around us about how our bodies should look, dress, even act. These messages do not consider how our bodies are different. These messages can value appearance over health.

Many things effect our appearance. These include genetics, experiences, ethnicity, and access to food or activity. Our appearance does not always reflect how healthy we are.

# Appearance ideals

The way our culture tells us is the ideal way to look at a certain moment in time is an **appearance ideal**. Appearance ideals are based on norms not fact, and they change all the time. This makes them unrealistic, even impossible, to live up to. Trying to fit into an ideal can cause stress and make it harder to be happy and present in your everyday life. It can be harmful to our physical and mental health in the short and long term.

# What else can we value?

Our bodies are much more than how they look. Instead of your appearance, try to celebrate how bodies move and feel, and things we can do. There are many things we can value that do not have to do with appearance, such as:

* Being kind to your friends and family
* Working hard at school
* Being creative or artistic
* Commitment to a sport or activity
* Being passionate and enthusiastic
* Having a great imagination.

# How do ideals develop?

# Media influence

The media can influence how we see and feel about our physical selves. The media often follows ‘appearance ideals’ in what it chooses to include in shows and stories. It creates social norms by what it represents. This happens across all forms of media – tv, magazines, music videos, animated cartoons, video games and social media.

A careful look at what is in media will show certain ideals appear more often. Media can show people who fit into the appearance ideal as being happy or ‘successful’. And those who do not fit into the appearance ideal are often shown as less desirable. They might have less friends or romantic relationships. It’s important to remember this is all created.

Seeing appearance ideals in media can impact how we see ourselves. We might compare ourselves with what we see on the screen. This can lead to feelings of dissatisfaction.

# What can we do?

# Media literacy

Having strong media literacy helps us to see what media presents as ‘ideals’. Understanding what media is, how it works, and why media tries to persuade us, helps us to question what we see.

**Avoid comparisons**

Comparisons can impact on our wellbeing. They can happen when

- we compare ourselves to others in our own heads

- people make comments about others.

Comments can be about how someone looks, their hair, their size, their clothes or their shape. People can compare themselves to a photo in a magazine, or a celebrity in the media, or to friends. Talking about appearance can impact on how others feel, and how you feel about yourself. Try focusing instead on non-appearance values.

**Check the source**

Think about where you go for information. Not all sources of information are the same. Some can even be harmful. Check who is providing the information, why, what they might be trying to sell and what might be in it for them.

**Aim for confidence**

Having positive self-talk can make us feel better about ourselves. Focus on what you want to do or achieve, rather than how you look or comparing yourself to someone else. Eat well, move often and try to get enough sleep. These practices can help us stay active, feel good, and be well.

# For more information and support:

[Butterfly Foundation](https://butterfly.org.au/)

[ReachOut](https://au.reachout.com/identity-and-gender/body-image)