

# A Tool for Everyone Working with Children & Youth

Our children and youth hear and see many messages on health, body shape and size. The language we use, the behaviours we present and the environment we provide can all contribute to healthy bodies and healthy minds. We can achieve this through an environment that fosters self-acceptance, fair and respectful communication skills as well as healthy eating & physical activity opportunities. Children and youth are always watching, so those working with them can have a huge impact by role modeling fun, and healthy behaviours.

Use this tool to assess how you work with children and youth. Here you will find ideas and tips that can move the focus from negative (weight-centered) to positive (healthy behaviors).

Healthy behaviour focus:	Weight-centered focus:
<b><i>Physical activity</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Have fun &amp; feel good, strong and fit</li><li>• Explore a variety of different activities to find the ones you enjoy</li><li>• Be comfortable enough with your body to learn new skills and abilities</li></ul>	<b><i>Exercise</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Focus on burning fat &amp; calories</li><li>• Feel like you “must” work out or feel like a failure if you don’t</li><li>• Become critical of your body and obsessed with exercise</li></ul>
<b><i>Balanced &amp; healthy eating</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Enjoy a variety of tasty and nutritious foods following Canada’s Food Guide in moderation and without guilt</li><li>• Use words like “Everyday” &amp; “Sometimes” foods</li><li>• Listen to your body &amp; be comfortable saying when you are hungry and when you are full</li><li>• Eat balanced &amp; regular meals and snacks including breakfast</li></ul>	<b><i>Dieting</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fad diets, skipping meals, restrictive eating and associating guilt with certain foods</li><li>• Label foods as good &amp; bad</li><li>• Judge yourself as good &amp; bad based on what you eat</li><li>• Make a rule that you must eat all the food on your plate</li><li>• Weigh yourself &amp; talk about it</li><li>• Use food as a reward or punishment</li></ul>
<b><i>Self-acceptance</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Take care of your body</li><li>• Understand that health can look different for every body. Talk about accepting different body shapes and sizes</li><li>• Identify unrealistic &amp; unhealthy media images</li><li>• Challenge that critical voice in your head that makes you feel bad about your body</li><li>• Recognize &amp; encourage a child’s individual talents and positive behaviours</li><li>• Role model positive body image &amp; self-esteem</li></ul>	<b><i>A negative body image</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Judge yourself or others based on body, shape, or size</li><li>• Critically compare your body to others in the media or in your life</li><li>• Allow society’s “ideal” body image to guide your eating &amp; physical activity behaviours</li><li>• Talk about signs &amp; symptoms of eating disorders</li></ul>

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# Create an environment that supports *Positive Healthy Behaviour*

## Here's how:

### Reflect on:

- Your beliefs and attitudes about body size, eating, activity and how you feel about yourself.
- Weight-centered messages such as “you look great”, “you’ve lost weight”, “I was bad today I ate cake” and their negative impact.

### Teach children & youth to:

- Focus on their abilities rather than on their appearance.
- Treat others with respect.
- Compliment others on their talents and accomplishments.
- Identify & challenge misleading media messages and understand the power of advertising.

### Listen:

- To what children & youth say about themselves and others.
- Use these opportunities to promote positive language.

### Advocate:

- For access to healthy foods where children & youth meet. The foods that are available have a strong influence on the foods that they choose.
- To make the healthy choice the easy choice.
- To build connections with parents & community partners to support these positive behaviour messages.

### Provide opportunities for children & youth to:

- Find their interests and discover fun things to do.
- Do activities outside. We tend to be more active and happy when we are in nature.
- Try different activities so they can find something they enjoy!
- Plan, shop and prepare meals and snacks.
- Plan and lead games & activities.
- Eat together. It is important for more than just general nutrition. The discussions that arise help children & youth develop their own communication, decision making, and social skills as well as their self-esteem and social supports.

### Discourage:

- Children & youth from weighing themselves. Weight is not the best measure of health for growing children.
- Commenting on people's weight, shape or size.

### Appreciate:

- That children's bodies change and grow. Celebrate that bodies come in all shapes and sizes.



Adapted with permission from the Leeds,  
Grenville & Lanark District Health Unit