



ONLINE BODY IMAGE

1. Guidance
2. Lesson Plan





Factors influencing body image:

We can have both a positive or negative body image and this can change and fluctuate much like confidence or self-esteem.

Body image can be influenced by a number of different factors including pressure or expectations set by peers, family or society as well as the portrayal of bodies in the media, social media or pornography.

Young people will build up an idea of what they think the perfect body looks like for both genders and could feel pressured to conform to this.

Impact of body image issues online on young people:

As young people go through hormonal changes and new experiences, their bodies naturally grow and change. Their weight and shape can fluctuate, and their skin type can change, all of which can have an impact on their self-esteem and emotional state.

Young people may also feel pressure from their friends, social media or the wider media to look a particular way. The internet is full of images and videos, some of which may seem to portray an idealised state of 'normal'. Frequently engaging with this portrayal of perfection can lead young people to compare their own body with others online and feel inadequate or less confident and unhappy with how others see them online. This could lead them to alter the way in which they portray themselves online in order to feel accepted or even 'normal'.

What can I do as an educator to support young people with the issue of body image online?

It is important to challenge the online portrayal of perfection that young people may be seeing. Remind them that a lot of what we see online is highly edited or carefully selected to show only what the person wants you to see. You can also discuss practical tips with students for what to do if they ever need help with body image issues;

- Remember everyone is different so try not to compare yourself
- Report or block any unkind comments online and tell someone (this could be someone at home or school or even a friend)
- Contact [Childline](#) for advice and support
- Write down 3 things you like about yourself and read it each morning
- Focus on your hobbies and the things you are good at – this can help to build confidence

Pressure of creating your personal online 'brand'

During our focus groups, young people spoke about the pressures online to look a certain way and conform to a particular 'ideal'. They commented that this didn't only include pressure about your body (size, shape etc.) but also on what you wear (branded clothing etc.), how you pose and what filter you use.

This pressure, along with how celebrities use social media, has promoted some young people to develop their own personal online 'brand'. This 'brand' often consists of selecting a certain look and style to your photos so that all of your online content has a uniform feel. It can be achieved by having a chosen filter or style of image with the hope of receiving more likes or follows.

During our focus groups one girl commented that mirror selfies were 'her style' and that she is constantly annoying her mum when they go shopping as she cannot pass a mirror without taking a new selfie.

This pressure to conform to a certain look may leave young people unnecessarily comparing themselves to an unrealistic idea of 'perfection'.

Some people have chosen to fight back against this online pressure and become part of a body positive movement online sharing a more realistic portrayal of body image and messages about being body positive.

Key issues:

- ▶ Perception of one's own body image compared to others
- ▶ Desire to alter the online portrayal of appearance
- ▶ Pressure from using social media and filters
- ▶ Personal online 'brand'

Guidance for the accompanying films is available on [page 13](#)

"I wish we could just put pictures and selfies up of ourselves without filtering and feel like it's good enough to put up online. I wish our natural selves could be better than the filtered ones and that we were just as happy with ourselves as we are with filtered pictures."

Young person, Childnet focus group

Key standards for teaching about body image:

The PSHE Association has published [practical guidance for teachers about the safe and confident teaching of body image in schools](#), as part of the PSHE curriculum.

This includes:

- Exploring what body image is and why it is an important part of the curriculum
- Creating a school environment that supports and promotes positive body image
- Building teaching about body image into a planned PSHE education programme
- Addressing the needs of vulnerable groups
- Using visitors in the classroom to support the teaching of body image
- Working with parents



Online Body Image



Key words: body image, appearance, social media, personal online 'brand', filters



Time: 60 minutes+



Resources: projector/whiteboard, PowerPoint slides, worksheets, plain paper

Intended learning outcomes:

- Students can identify where the pressure to look a certain way online comes from.
- Students can make comparisons between what is considered the 'ideal' body image online and the actual reality.
- Students can propose effective strategies to help young people develop a healthy and positive attitude towards their body image.
- Students will know where they can go for advice and support with body image concerns.

This toolkit has been created with timings as a guide. The activities are designed to facilitate discussions which may fall outside of the suggested timings. In this case, the follow on activities can be used in subsequent sessions or you may wish to select the most appropriate activities for your session and pupils.

Lesson outline	Description	Time	Resources	Class set up
Starter*	What does 'body image' mean to you? - Discuss and define	5 mins	Plain paper	Whole class
Talking Heads	3 talking heads - discussing the impact being online has on someone's body image and the pressure they may feel to look a certain way	10 mins	Films and/or worksheet 3.1	Whole class
Discussion	Discussion questions – Explore the themes of the talking heads in more detail	10 mins	n/a	Whole class
Follow on activities				
Activity A*	Challenging online myths – Myth cracking activity	10 mins	Plain paper	Group/pair work
Activity B*	Changing the way we look online – Discussion	10 mins	Plain paper, whiteboard	Individual
Activity C*	Be the change – Strategy building	10 mins	Plain paper	Group work
Plenary*	#RealityCheck - Reflect and hand out exit slip	5 mins	Worksheet 3.2	Whole class

A PowerPoint presentation has been provided as a guide to support the flow of activities and delivery of questions. This can be found at www.childnet.com/pshetoolkits.

Reminder of the ground rules

At the beginning of each lesson, briefly go through your agreed ground rules to ensure everyone knows what is expected of them during the discussions and activities that follow. Explain that this lesson may explore some sensitive issues. Review the guidelines for a successful PSHE lesson in the educators' guidance section or on **page 16**.



Starter:

What does 'body image' mean to you? - Discuss and define



5 mins



No resources needed

This task asks young people to consider how important appearance and body image are by exploring the messages, comments and content they see online.

NB - Feedback given from students will give an indication of what they are seeing online and help you steer the lesson to respond to their needs.

1. Write 'body image' on the whiteboard and ask for any words, phrases, hashtags, photo crazes etc. they associate with body image online e.g. confident, inferior, curvy, size matters, #bodyconfident, #bodygoals, #skinnygoals, celebrity photo crazes to copy etc.
2. Record their chosen examples on the board as a thought shower or use an online word cloud generator like Wordle or WordArt. You could also ask students to complete this activity in pairs on plain paper.
3. Ask the class to point out which examples have a positive influence and consider why they are more positive than others?
4. You may wish to consider as a class whether the same word cloud could reflect body image influence for both males and female. Which examples would be just for males and which for females?

Follow on questions:

- When you see comments online about body image, are they mostly positive or negative?
- Which gender has a harder time online? Why?
- Where does the pressure to look good come from? (Friends, celebrities, online companies, adverts etc.)
- Do the images young people see online make them take better care of their bodies or put greater pressure on them?
- What has greater impact on body image? – Pictures we see or comments underneath the pictures?
- Have you ever bought something that changes your appearance as a result of seeing something online? E.g. make-up, clothes etc. Why?

Explain that the lesson is about the things we see, hear and read online and how they affect the way we feel about our bodies and how we look. Be mindful the issue of body image can have a great impact on young people so it is important to treat the issue sensitively. Try to frame discussions during this session around health and well-being. The Collins Dictionary defines healthy as having a healthy attitude about something and showing good sense.

The Collins Dictionary defines body image as, 'An individual's concept of his or her own body.'

During our focus groups we found that young people also viewed body image as being about your whole look online as well as your physical body, e.g. clothes, make up, types of selfies they share, chosen filter etc.

"Idols are what influences young people online, it's who they look up to and want to be the same as. It could be someone from school or anyone they know."

Young person, Childnet focus group

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Number of selfies young people take before posting online

43%

of young people worry about how attractive they look online

30%

of young people said they have felt sad about their appearance after seeing something online

45%

of young people have used a filter in the last year to make themselves look better

Power of Image Report 2017, UK Safer Internet Centre



Talking Heads



20 mins



Films and/or scripts (worksheet 3.1)

Guidance for the accompanying films is available on [page 13](#)



Overview

Beth, Sadie and Ryan explore the necessity, pressure and expectation that many young people are feeling to always look their best online. They explore the way in which ideal body types are portrayed to us and the impact of this. They consider how the barrage of online advertisements, celebrity culture, comments and posts are dictating how we live, feel and think as well as what we wear, eat and drink.



Starter questions



5 mins



n/a

Before watching the talking heads use the following starter questions to assess young people's prior thoughts, feelings and opinions about how being online can impact on how we feel about body image.

How influential are the images we see online? Who has the greater online influence - celebrities or our peers?

Do you think people are more concerned with how they look online or offline and why?

Do you think there is more edited or unedited content online and what would people prefer to see?



Watch the talking heads



5 mins



Films and/or scripts (worksheet 3.1)



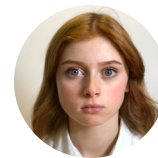
Ryan

"It's just how it is."



Beth

"How do I compare?"



Sadie

"It's what people think."



Follow on discussion questions



10 mins

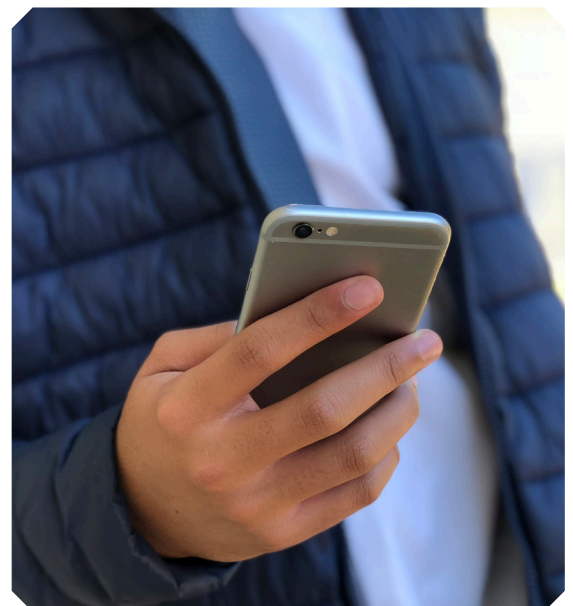


n/a



Ryan "It's just how it is."

- Online appearance is clearly very important to Ryan - On a scale of 1-10 (10=extremely high) how important do you think appearance online is to young people?
- Ryan thinks there's an equal but different type of pressure for boys to look good online as there is for girls. Do you agree and what are these pressures?
- Why does Ryan feel the need to post 'topless pictures' of himself?
- Ryan says that you will get more likes if you're fitter, skinnier or prettier - Is this comment realistic? Fair?





Talking Heads (Continued)



20 mins



Films and/or scripts (worksheet 3.1)

Guidance for the accompanying films is available on [page 13](#)



Follow on discussion questions



10 mins



n/a



Beth “How do I compare?”

- Beth says that, ‘Slim people are happier and more popular’ and this influences how she wants her online image to be. Do you think people compare themselves more to others online or offline?
- Beth talks about diets she has seen online and how much the images she sees online impact on how she feels about her body and weight. What advice would you give someone who was feeling this way?
- Beth tells us that she will take several selfies in order to obtain the perfect picture. How many selfies do you think someone would take before they post it online? Why do you think someone would choose not to post the first selfie they take online?

Research carried out by the UK Safer Internet Centre in 2017 found that young people aged 8-17:

- Take on average 12 selfies before posting one online
- Want an average of 48 ‘likes’ on a photo in order to feel happy about it
- 23% of young people have deleted a photo because it didn’t get enough likes

- By doing this, Beth is carefully creating her online image. How might this impact on other people that see it? What other choices might someone make in order to build their online image?

During our focus groups we found that young people viewed body image as being about your whole look online as well as your physical body, e.g. clothes, make up, types of selfies they share, chosen filter etc. They referred to this as building your own ‘online brand’. See further guidance about this on [page 52](#).



Sadie “It’s what people think”

- Sadie talks about how some people may take down a picture if it doesn’t get a nice comment. What has more impact – a positive or a negative comment online and why do you think this is?
- Sadie talks about body shaming. What is body shaming? How does it happen online and how does it make people feel?

Body shaming is abuse of a person due to perceived physical flaws. This can happen online by the sharing of pictures and videos to point out flaws, and/or comments on a post or posts discussing body image.

- Sadie challenges the idea that ‘only good people should post pictures online’ and is confident in ignoring the online pressures on body image. What do you think her strategy is?
- Can being online ever support someone to make healthy choices or improve how they feel about themselves and how does it do this?



Activity A:

Challenging online myths - Myth cracking activity



10 mins



Plain paper

This activity asks young people to reflect on the messages they see online about body image and consider how realistic they are.

How to run the activity:

1. Work through the myths on the right as a class. Begin by sharing one myth with the class and decide what the real truth behind it might be.
2. Read out another myth and ask the students to decide on the real truth in pairs.
3. Repeat for the third myth and challenge students to generate their own myths and complete the task in pairs by sharing their myths with another pair for them to crack.
4. Each pair then works on the myths which have been passed to them in order to decide on the truth.
5. Ask some pairs to share the myths handed to them and their chosen truths.

Follow on questions:

- Are these myths targeted at one gender in particular?
- Where has this myth come from and what/who reinforces it?
- What could the issue be for a young person if they were to believe the myth?

Myths

1. It is more important to look good online than offline.
2. Young people are obsessed with how they look online.
3. Only girls care about how they look online.

“You’re more concerned with how you look online because it’s out there and you grow with it.”

Young person, Childnet focus group



Activity B:

Changing the way we look online - Discussion



10 mins



Plain paper, whiteboard

This activity asks young people to consider the ways you can alter your appearance online and create the idea of an online ‘brand’; reflecting on the positive and negative impacts this may have.

During our Childnet focus groups across the UK, young people viewed body image as including your whole look online as well as your physical body, e.g. clothes, make up, types of selfies they share, chosen filter etc.

How to run the activity:

1. Begin by discussing the idea of creating a personal online ‘brand’ by asking students:
 - What would this mean? – *Sharing content which all has a similar look and style.*
 - How would you do it? – *Choosing a set filter for every image, choosing particular clothing/ locations, editing/ cropping images to appear the same etc.*
 - Why would you do it? – *To look more appealing, to gain more followers/ likes etc.*
2. Display the words before and after on the board and pose the question,

‘How can you change the way you look online?’

“You could have a really good body, but if you don’t wear branded clothes you won’t get as much attention.”

Young person, Childnet focus group

“First you have to decide what type of photo; is it a selfie or mirror selfie, what facial expressions to pull. It’s almost too much to think about when you’re young because everyone is just expecting your selfies to look great when you post them.”

Young person, Childnet focus group



3. Ask the young people to discuss in pairs or small groups the choices we make before and after taking a picture/ filming ourselves e.g. **Before** - angle, clothing change, lighting. **After** – filter, cropping, caption.
4. Share the answers as a class and create a class table.
Split the class in half, asking one side to discuss the impact of personal ‘brands’ on ‘the person sharing the content’ and the other half on ‘other people online viewing the content’
5. Ask for feedback from each side and discuss. Possible discussions/feedback could include;
 - Person sharing the content – increased pressure to take the right picture, desire to look the same as others online, increased awareness in what they are sharing etc.
 - Other people viewing the content – desire to look the same, increased feelings of inadequacy, etc.

Follow up questions:

- What are the perceived benefits of being able to alter the way you look online? (feel better, get likes, display your individual style)
- What are the disadvantages of being able to alter the way you look online? (length of time needed, comments you could receive about being ‘fake’, Everyone’s images looking the same, impact on self-esteem)
- How important are the clothes that people wear online?



Activity C:

Be the change - Strategy building



10 mins



Plain paper

This activity asks young people to reflect on how we could achieve a positive body image for all.

How to run the activity:

1. Pose the statement:

‘Everyone at our school feels confident in themselves and happy with their body image.’

Discuss how true this is for your school/community.

2. Ask students how we could make changes to achieve this – allow them time in small groups to come up with a plan/ proposal to share with the class.
3. Explain to them that they can consider any way which they feel may benefit the students in their school.
4. Ask 1 or 2 groups to feedback their ideas as a class or ask groups to join together and so all groups are able to share their ideas.

“There’s a lot of peer pressure when people want to look like their friends and they might see them as more popular than them so they want to step into their shoes and see what it’s like.”

Young person, Childnet focus group



Plenary:

#RealityCheck - Healthy Behaviour - Strategy building



5 mins



Worksheet 3.2, plain paper

Share the following statement with the class

‘My friends, the people I follow, everyone always looks way better than me. It’s impossible not to compare yourself to others.’

Ask students to use all that they have learnt from the lesson to help respond to the statement and help the person feel better about themselves. You may wish to ask them to write a written response or to discuss the advice they would give as a class.

Review the intended learning outcomes and hand out the exit slip, **worksheet 3.2** to each student to be filled out. Encourage each student to tear the last question from the page to add into the anonymous question box. These questions can be answered in the next lesson or be used to inform future planning.

“I wish we could just put pictures up of ourselves without filtering and feel like it’s good enough. I wish our natural selves could be better than the filtered ones and that we were happy with ourselves as we are.”

Young person, Childnet focus group





Signposting

YP Face It: Online support for young people with visible difference - conditions or injuries affecting their appearance - www.yfaceit.co.uk

Beat: 0808 801 0711 - A charity with a youth hotline who work to help people with eating disorders - www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk

If you wanted to follow this up with another lesson they also have a Beat Young Ambassadors programme where an 18-25 year old with past experience of an eating disorder can come into your school
www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/get-involved/ambassadors

Childline: 0800 11 11 – A service that allows young people to talk to someone anonymously without judgement via chat, or via phone, on whatever issue they would like. A lot of helpful support and advice is on their website – www.childline.org.uk

Childline YouTube channel: Childline have produced a series of videos called 'Voice Box' (www.youtube.com/user/childline) which cover issues like **body positivity for girls** (youtu.be/vs5Qb2dKyvU), **boys' body image** (youtu.be/G1Kdii4UN9g) and **the portrayal of bodies in the media** (youtu.be/38aVtDmLXOc)

The Mix: 0808 808 4994 – A charity which offers essential support to under 25s on anything from embarrassing problems and weird questions to please-don't-make-me-say-it-out-loud thoughts - www.themix.org.uk

YoungMinds: This website has lots of information for young people about their well-being and mental health, and also has information for teachers and parents – www.youngminds.org.uk



Extension activities

1. As a class create some of the ideas generated through the 'Be the change' activity and run them throughout the school.
2. In June 2017 the **British Youth Council** examined the issue of body image and collected evidence from young people and professionals about the online impact. Discuss the questions that the committee asked and hold a class debate:
 - Does the Government have a responsibility to discourage the use of social media, the internet and communications platforms in ways which promote poor body image? What should it be doing in this regard?
 - Do internet companies, social media platforms or other platforms have a responsibility to tackle trends which entrench poor body image? What are they already doing in this area? What more should they be doing?
 - Are their specific groups of young people particularly prone to poor body image, or less likely to seek help? What causes these trends?
 - To what extent is dissatisfaction with body image contributing to the reported increase in mental health problems amongst children and young people?





Worksheet 3.1

Talking Heads Character Summary Scripts



Talking Head 1 - Ryan - "It's how it is."

This talking head sets out to challenge common perceptions about the images we post and see online.



'Girls reckon there's more pressure on them to look good in photo's but there's definitely just as much pressure on guys to look good as well. It's a different kind of pressure. Like, for girls it's all about wearing makeup. Whereas for me it's all about eating well, working out and looking good. For boys, I think it's all about looking fit and it's normal to post topless pics of yourself to show off your body. Because the reality is the fitter, prettier or skinnier you are, the more likes you're going to get. I really don't get it when ugly people post pictures of themselves online.

What do you think?



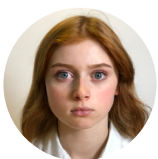
Talking Head 2 - Beth - "How do I compare?"

This talking head looks at the influence of online images and how these images can cause us to compare our bodies to a perceived 'norm' we see online.



'It's a fact that slim people are happier and more popular. They get more likes. They get more followers. It definitely influences how I want to look. I even went on this crazy diet a while ago because I wasn't happy with the way that I looked. Only then someone commented that I was way too skinny. You can't win. I do take extra care with the way that I look online and will literally take dozens of photos and change my clothes loads of times before I'm happy. The kind of photo you take matters as well. Like whether it's going to be a mirror selfie or just a regular selfie. What kind of angles you're going to use. Then I'll edit and filter before I post because you really do need to look your best online.

What do you think?



Talking Head 3 - Sadie - "It's what people think."

This talking head questions the influence online imagery has on our body image and considers it from both a positive and negative angle.



'I know so many people who constantly need to be told that they look OK and if they don't get a nice comment in response to a picture they post, they take it down. Then they feel rubbish about themselves. I'd say one of the biggest issues facing young people online is self-confidence and body shaming. People can be really unkind online because they think their identity cannot be found. I overheard a conversation where someone said 'only good looking people should post pictures online'. I mean, what is pretty anyway and what does it actually mean? Why should it be down to other people to make us feel good about ourselves?

What do you think?



Worksheet 3.2

Exit slip



Online Body Image			
Intended learning outcomes	I'm still not sure	I'm nearly there	I've got it
I can identify where the pressures to look a certain way online come from.			
I can make comparisons between what is considered the 'ideal' body image online and the reality.			
I can propose effective strategies to help young people develop a healthy and positive attitude towards their body image.			
I know where to go to find advice and support with body image concerns.			
Exit slip			
3	Things I have learned today...		
	2	Things I already knew...	
		Question I still have...	
1			

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