

**Building Blocks**  
**Healthy Eating, Physical Activity, and Oral Health**  
**A Lesson Plan Module for Teachers**  
**Junior Kindergarten – Grade 6**

**Healthy Eating**  
**Grade 4**  
**Lesson 2**

**Lesson 2 – Body Image Word Search and Follow That Star**

**Curriculum Expectations:**

Students will outline the factors that influence body shape and size (e.g., heredity, diet, exercise).

**Objectives:**

Students will learn about body image and growth during puberty.

**Suggested Outline**

Section 1: Introduce Today’s Lesson

Section 2: Discussion/Background Information

Section 3: Activity #1 and Activity #2

Section 4: Conclusion

**Section 1: Introduce Today’s Lesson**

Today we will learn about body image and growth during puberty by having a discussion and completing a “Body Image Word Search” and “Follow that Star” activity sheet.

**Section 2: Background Information/Discussion**

**Factors Influencing Food Choices and or Body Shapes and Size**

Children come in many shapes and sizes, and make different choices about their food practices. A variety of factors influence their food choices, body image and self-esteem. To promote good health, it is important to foster healthy eating habits, regular physical activity, acceptance of individual shapes and sizes, and a positive sense of self-worth.

**Self-Esteem**

Self-esteem is the confidence and satisfaction a person has in themselves. It begins to develop from birth through relationships within the family, and continues to be shaped by the significant people in one’s life. Supportive parents, teachers, coaches, and friends are key to maintaining and enhancing healthy self-esteem in children and teens. It is especially important for girls to have supportive people because they are socialized to look for approval from others as a means of defining self-worth more often than boys are.



A number of characteristics add to feelings of self-esteem, including talents, social skills, intellectual abilities, interests, ability to help others, and physical appearance. When people increase their confidence in their unique characteristics, they can reduce their dependence on physical appearance as their sole measure of self-worth. When they have a healthy self-esteem, they feel more positive about their bodies. When they feel better about their bodies, they find it is easier to make decisions for themselves that promote health, such as taking care of the needs of their bodies. Some ways people develop healthy self-esteem are by practicing positive self-talk, focusing on things they like about themselves, acting with confidence, or connecting with people who make them feel better. Challenge young people to think of things they like about themselves beyond physical appearance (e.g., a good swimmer, an avid reader, and a loyal friend). Encourage them to stop focusing on individual parts of their bodies, and to begin focusing on their body as a whole.

### **Body Image**

Body image is a part of self-esteem. Body image is the picture people have of their body and how they think others see them and their body. A person can have a body image anywhere along a continuum, with one end being positive image and the other being negative image.

Between the ages of nine and twelve, most children become dissatisfied with how they look. Children this age may feel that they are too short, too tall, too fat or too skinny. Furthermore, they may not like their nose or teeth; they may even think that their peers notice these features and do not like them either. These are examples of negative body images. Studies have shown that children as young as nine are trying to lose weight in an effort to “improve” their bodies.

Adults, peers, and the media play important roles in the development of the image children create of themselves. Children at a young age are taught to idealize being slender and discriminate against overweight people. In other countries, people may prefer different body sizes and shapes. Movie stars and magazine models in North America often have body shapes that are too thin for good health.

It is important that children develop healthy body images and accept themselves as people with unique personalities, body shapes, and sizes. Through this support and positive attitude, children will grow into healthy adults, with a positive self-esteem.

### **Suggestions to Help Children Feel Good about Themselves:**

- Promote a classroom philosophy that fosters the understanding that many body shapes have beauty and value.
- Accept children as they are, no matter their weight, size or shape. Focus on children's abilities, not their appearance.
- Listen when children talk to you about their changing bodies and their feelings.
- Promote healthy eating and physical activity, but resist coaxing heavy children to diet or small children to eat more. Encourage children to participate in active play and decide for themselves how much to eat. Help them choose foods according to Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating
- Feel good about yourself. Children are more likely to feel good about themselves when the adults they look up to have a positive view of themselves
- Encourage activities that promote children's self-esteem without focusing on appearance

### **Heredity**

Different body shapes and sizes are among the things that make each person unique, and they are determined largely by heredity. Some individuals and their families tend to gain body fat more easily than others do. Because body shape and size are determined by genetics, many heavy children will never be "thin". However, they can be healthy active people who feel good about themselves. Being comfortable with one's body is an important step in developing a good sense of self.

Today's culture can be cruel to children who are heavier than what is considered to be "normal". Some children try to lose weight by dieting because they fear becoming fat. This action can be the start of restrictive eating in a fruitless effort to reach unrealistic goals of thinness and body shape. Professionals need to help children of all sizes understand and accept that to a great extent their bodies have been programmed to be a certain size and shape. All children should be encouraged to establish a healthy eating pattern and participate in regular physical activity as a way to feel healthy, energetic, fit, and have fun.

### **Puberty**

Just before puberty, children undergo a growth spurt. For girls, this spurt usually begins at about eight to ten years old, while for boys it is at about 11 to 13. During this time, 20% of adult height and 50% of adult weight are gained. Growth in height and weight do not always happen simultaneously. Some children gain weight before they gain height. Other children grow taller before they gain weight. Adolescence is also a time when body proportions change dramatically. Whether or not a child is undergoing a growth spurt, and the uniqueness of that growth spurt, will influence their body shape and size.



Preadolescent children need to eat adequate amounts and enough variety of foods to prepare for rapid growth. Yet, many children can become dissatisfied with their looks. During the late childhood years, the body physiologically prepares itself for the rapid growth of the teen years. If energy needs are not adequately met, physical growth can be delayed and possibly even stunted. How each person grows is affected by many factors. Bodies are like computers that run on their own growth program. Each child is on his or her own genetically determined growth schedule.

### **Discussion**

Introduce the concept of body image and growth during puberty (see Background Information). Explain that children’s bodies begin to change as they enter puberty. Explain that many children become dissatisfied with how they look in response to rapid changes. A typical 9 to 12 year old will report that he or she is too short, too tall, too skinny or too fat. Often certain body parts they especially dislike are identified.

Discuss:

- That no two individuals are exactly the same;
- That our uniqueness means that we all have complementary abilities;
- That they are all changing at their own rate as they grow, and to change in a healthy way they need to eat well and enjoy active play;
- That everyone has things they like about themselves and things they don’t like as much;
- That under no circumstances is it acceptable to tease someone about the way they look; and
- That everyone has differences in what they think is beautiful.

### **Section 3: Activity #1 Body Image Word Search**

Have the students complete the *Body Image Word Search* activity sheet. Go over the activity sheet with the students using their questions and comments to stimulate discussion.

### **Activity #2 Follow that Star!**

Instruct students to complete the *Follow That Star* activity sheet. This activity encourages students to think of words that describe themselves and to highlight qualities that are most important to them.

### **Section 4: Conclusion**

Today we learned about body image and growth during puberty by having a discussion and completing a “Body Image Word Search” and “Follow that Star” activity sheet.

