Weight Neutrality: Why Body Image Education Matters More Than Ever



Image credit: Canva

We are constantly surrounded by messages that suggest our bodies should look a certain way. From social media to advertising, unrealistic beauty standards can negatively affect how we see ourselves, especially children and youth.

Body dissatisfaction is linked to low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, disordered eating, and eating disorders. That's why promoting positive body image has never been more important.

What is Weight Neutrality?

Weight neutrality is an evidence-informed approach that focuses on healthy behaviours rather than body weight. It recognizes that health is influenced by many factors including; genetics, mental health, access to food, sleep, stress, and social determinants of health, not simply the number on a scale.

Instead of focusing on weight, a weight-neutral approach encourages:

- Eating a variety of nourishing foods.
- Enjoying regular movement.
- Getting enough sleep.
- Managing stress.
- Respecting and caring for our bodies.

Research shows that healthy behaviours can improve health, regardless of whether they result in weight loss.

Why Body Image Education Matters

Positive body image isn't about loving every aspect of your appearance; it's about valuing your body for what it can do and recognizing that your worth extends far beyond how you look.

Body image education helps children and youth (and adults too):

- Build confidence and resilience.
- Recognize unrealistic beauty standards.
- Appreciate body diversity.
- Reduce weight stigma and appearance-based bullying.
- Develop healthier relationships with food and movement.

These skills can help protect against body dissatisfaction and disordered eating while supporting lifelong well-being.

Supporting Healthy Communities

The Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority is committed to promoting positive body image, weight-inclusive health, and a food-neutral approach to nutrition education.

Our Community Wellness Dietitian, Caroline Le Clair, is a certified **BE REAL™ Body Confident Schools Program Ambassador**, providing evidence-based presentations and professional learning opportunities that help adults better understand body image, weight stigma, and the important role they play in supporting body confidence among children and youth.

Caroline has also completed training to facilitate the **BE REAL™ Let's Eat program**, a three-part, weight-neutral nutrition lesson designed for middle and high school students. Let's Eat introduces Tuned-In Eating, an approach that empowers youth to become the experts in their own eating patterns, preferences, and needs. The program supports a positive relationship with food, helps prevent body dissatisfaction and eating disorders, and is inclusive of diverse cultures, economic backgrounds, and neurodiverse experiences.

Learn more about **BE REAL™** by visiting their website: https://berealusa.org.

The Community Wellness Team also offers **Empowered Eating**, a four-week program developed by health care professionals from Manitoba. This supportive, evidence-informed program helps participants explore their relationship with food, understand the many influences that shape eating habits, and develop greater self-compassion. Through guided discussions and practical strategies, participants can build a more positive and peaceful relationship with food and themselves.

The next Empowered Eating session will take place on November 3, 10, 17, and 22, 2026, from 10 a.m.–12 p.m. via Microsoft Teams. For more information or to register, contact wellness@ierha.ca or call 1-877-979-9355.

Online Support available now - Body Peace Canada:

If you are looking for support right now, **BodyPeace Canada** is a free online resource available to anyone **14 years of age and older living in Canada**.

Whether you are experiencing an eating disorder, concerned about your relationship with food, exercise, or your body, or looking for support during recovery, BodyPeace Canada offers accessible, compassionate resources to help.

This online program provides opportunities for counselling, connection, and support to help individuals build a healthier relationship with food, movement, and body image.

Visit https://www.bodypeacecanada.ca to learn more or access support.

More support - National Eating Disorder Information Centre:

The National Eating Disorder Information Centre (NEDIC) provides free, evidence-informed resources to support individuals, families, and educators across Canada. Their primary offering is a free, confidential national helpline accessible via phone and live chat, delivering instant support, crisis management, and navigation to a localized database of over 1,500 treatment providers. For classrooms, NEDIC delivers the *Beyond Images* curriculum alongside interactive student workshops to promote media literacy and body acceptance, while equipping educators and healthcare professionals with specialized toolkits, weight-bias training, and clinical professional development. Visit their website for more information: https://nedic.ca/general-information/

Creating a culture of body confidence starts with changing the way we talk about health, food, and our bodies. By promoting weight-neutral approaches and providing education and support, we can help children, youth, and adults develop a healthier relationship with themselves and build resilience against harmful messages about appearance. Together, we can create communities where every body is respected, valued, and supported.

Submitted by:

Caroline Le Clair

Community Wellness Facilitator, Registered Dietitian, and Certified Chef
Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority
Phone: 204-467-4407
Email: cleclair@ierha.ca

Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority