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Mental health and substance use
information you can trust



Canadian Mental
Health Association
British Columbia
Mental health for all

learn about

body image, self-esteem and mental health

info sheets 2015 www.heretohelp.bc.ca



Body image is mental and emotional: it's both the mental picture that you have of your body and the way you feel about your body when you look in a mirror.

Body image and self-esteem start in the mind, not in the mirror. They can change the way you understand your value and worth. Healthy body image and self-esteem are a big part of well-being.

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Healthy body image is more than simply tolerating what you look like or “not disliking” yourself. A healthy body image means that you truly accept and like the way you look right now, and aren't trying to change your body to fit the way you think you should look. It means recognizing the individual qualities and strengths that make you feel good about yourself beyond weight, shape or appearance, and resisting the pressure to strive for the myth of the “perfect” body that you see in the media, online, in your communities.

Self-esteem is how you value and respect yourself as a person—it is the opinion

that you have of yourself inside and out. Self-esteem impacts how you take care of yourself, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Self-esteem is about your whole self, not just your body.

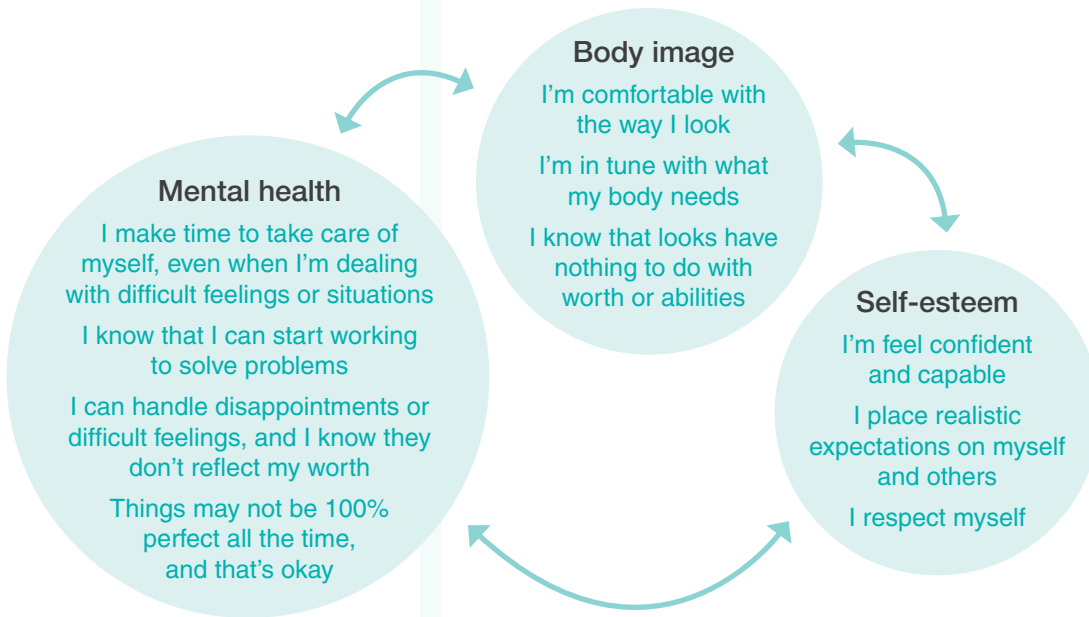
When you have good self-esteem, you value yourself, and you know that you deserve good care and respect—from yourself and from others. You can appreciate and celebrate your strengths and your abilities, and you don't put yourself down if you make a mistake. Good self-esteem means that you still feel like you're good enough even when you're dealing with difficult feelings or situations.

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Why do body image and self-esteem matter?

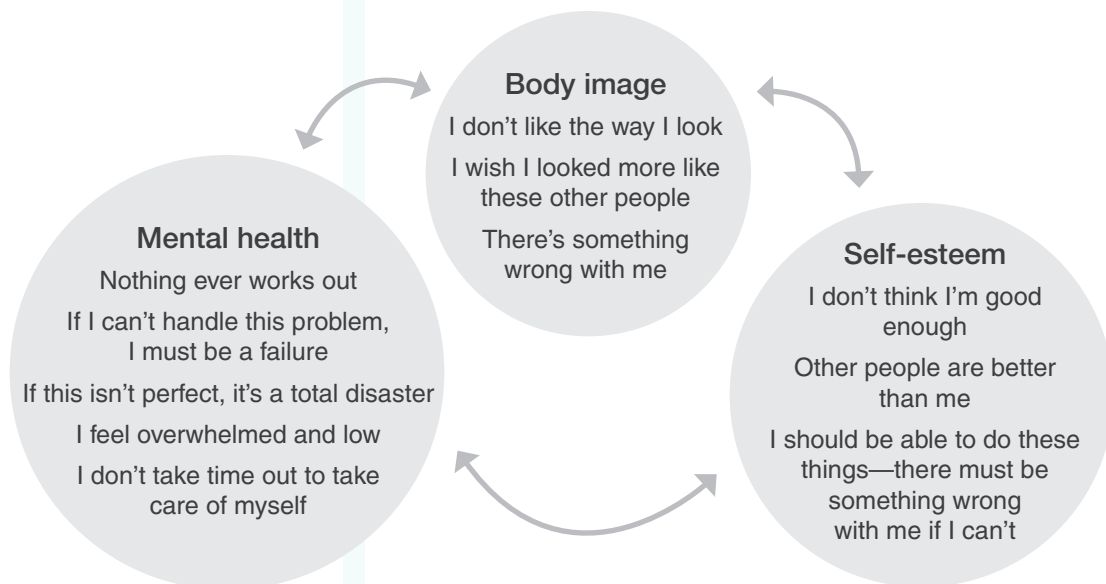
Body image and self-esteem directly influence each other—and your feelings, thoughts, and behaviours. If you don't like your body (or a part of your body), it's hard to feel good about your whole self. The reverse is also true: if you don't value yourself, it's hard to notice the good things and give your body the respect it deserves.

Below, see how good body image and self-esteem positively impact mental health:



These are just a few examples. As you can see, good body image, self-esteem, and mental health are not about making yourself feel happy all the time. They are really about respecting yourself and others, thinking realistically, and taking action to cope with problems or difficulties in healthy ways.

Below, see how poor body image and self-esteem negatively impact mental health:



“There is no true ideal body. It’s defined by culture, and it has changed over time. Your body is unique, and it’s a good body for you. No one body shape or size is a healthy body for anyone else.”

As you can see, the problem with negative thinking and feelings is that once people start to focus on shortcomings or problems in one area or one situation, it becomes very easy to only see problems in many other areas or situations. Negative thinking has a way of leading to more negative thinking.

How can I encourage a healthier body image?

Treat your body with respect.

Eat well-balanced meals and exercise because it makes you feel good and strong, not as a way to control your body.

Notice when you judge yourself or others based on weight, shape, or size. Ask yourself if there are any other qualities you could look for when those thoughts come up.

Dress in a way that makes you feel good about yourself, in clothes that fit you now.

Find a short message that helps you feel good about yourself and write it on mirrors around your home to remind you to replace negative thoughts with positive thoughts.

Surround yourself with positive friends and family who recognize your uniqueness and like you just as you are.

Be aware of how you talk about your body with family and friends. Do you often seek reassurance or validation from others to feel good about yourself? Do you often focus only on physical appearances?

Remember that everyone has challenges with their body image at times. When you talk with friends, you might discover that someone else wishes they had a feature you think is undesirable.

Write a list of the positive benefits of the body part or feature you don’t like or struggle to accept.

The next time you notice yourself having negative thoughts about your body and appearance, take a minute to think about what’s going on in your life. Are you feeling stressed out, anxious, or low? Are you facing challenges in other parts of your life? When negative thoughts come up, think about what you’d tell a friend if they were in a similar situation and then take your own advice.

Be mindful of messages you hear and see in the media and how those messages inform the way people feel about the way they look. Recognize and challenge those stereotypes! You can learn more about media literacy at www.mediasmarts.ca.

Ask your community centre, mental health organization or school about resiliency skills programs, which can help people increase self-esteem and well-being in general.

self-test: self-esteem

Read each statement and circle your response.

	strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree
On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	<input type="checkbox"/> 3 pt	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 pt	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 pt	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 pt
At times, I think I am no good at all.	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 pt	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 pt	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 pt	<input type="checkbox"/> 3 pt
I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	<input type="checkbox"/> 3 pt	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 pt	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 pt	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 pt
I am able to do things as well as most other people.	<input type="checkbox"/> 3 pt	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 pt	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 pt	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 pt
I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 pt	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 pt	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 pt	<input type="checkbox"/> 3 pt
I certainly feel useless at times.	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 pt	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 pt	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 pt	<input type="checkbox"/> 3 pt
I feel that I’m a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.	<input type="checkbox"/> 3 pt	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 pt	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 pt	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 pt
I wish I could have more respect for myself.	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 pt	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 pt	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 pt	<input type="checkbox"/> 3 pt
All in all, I tend to feel that I am a failure.	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 pt	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 pt	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 pt	<input type="checkbox"/> 3 pt
I take a positive attitude toward myself.	<input type="checkbox"/> 3 pt	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 pt	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 pt	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 pt

Add up the number of points in each response you circled. The higher the number, the higher your self-esteem.

Adapted from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.

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where do I go for more information?

Love Our Bodies, Love Ourselves at loveourbodiesloveourselves.blogspot.ca is a project of the B.C. Provincial Eating Disorders Awareness campaign. You'll find inspiring stories and advice on different aspects of eating disorders, body image and self-esteem, resiliency, and media literacy. You'll also find links to useful resources around the province.

Kelty Eating Disorders from Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre has a lot of information about disordered eating, eating disorders, and healthy living at www.keltyeatingdisorders.ca. The program finder tool can help you find service providers around BC.

Jessie's Legacy at Family Services of the North Shore aims to prevent eating disorders and support those who experience eating disorders. In addition to support and referral services, they offer Family FUNDamentals, a program to support healthy relationships between young children and parents around physical activity, food choices, body image, and self-esteem. You can learn about Jessie's Legacy at www.jessieslegacy.com.

HeretoHelp at www.heretohelp.bc.ca has a Wellness screening self-test (and tests for other areas of mental health, including depression and anxiety), a Wellness Module that explores healthy eating, and many other resources to help you learn about mental health and well-being.

Blue Wave at www.bluewavebc.ca is a youth mental health initiative from the Canadian Mental Health Association BC Division. Blue Wave has adapted a resiliency course called Living Life to the Full for youth, which includes a session on building confidence, and you can learn how to find courses in your area.

Mindcheck, for youth and young adults, has a section on body image and eating with a screening questionnaire and self-help resources. You can find Mindcheck at www.mindcheck.ca.

About-Face at www.about-face.org is a US organization that encourages women to look at the way bodies are shown in media. They have resources on body image, self-esteem, media literacy, and more.



This info sheet was written by the Canadian Mental Health Association's BC Division. The references for this fact sheet come from reputable government or academic sources and research studies. Please contact us if you would like the footnotes for this fact sheet. Fact sheets have been vetted by clinicians where appropriate.

This info sheet has adapted some content, with permission, from *Body Image and Self-Esteem: A guide for parents and youth* by Family Services of the North Shore.



BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions Information

HeretoHelp is a project of the BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions Information. The BC Partners are a group of nonprofit agencies working together to help individuals and families manage mental health and substance use problems, with the help of good quality information. We represent Anxiety Disorders Association of BC, BC Schizophrenia Society, Canadian Mental Health Association's BC Division, Centre for Addictions Research of BC, FORCE Society for Kids' Mental Health, Jessie's Legacy Program at Family Services of the North Shore, and Mood Disorders Association of BC. The BC Partners are funded by BC Mental Health and Addiction Services, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority.