

What Kind of Role Model are You?

What kind of role model are you for children with respect to healthy eating as well as physical activity, body image and self-esteem?

Activity One

What kind of role model are you with respect to healthy eating?

Answer the following questions on your own:

- Do you teach your students about the importance of eating a healthy breakfast, but skip breakfast yourself and sip on coffee throughout the morning?
- Do you encourage your students to bring in healthy snacks, but snack on doughnuts in the staffroom?

Teachers have a strong influence on the lives of students. In fact, elementary school teachers potentially have a greater influence on a child's health than any other group outside the home. Children who see teachers eating healthy foods are more likely eat well, too.



**Call the Health ACTION Line
1-800-660-5853 or 613-345-5685 or
visit our website at www.healthunit.org**

Activity Two

What kind of role model are you with respect to body image and self-esteem?

- Have you inadvertently promoted a fear of being fat by your words and actions?
- Are your perceptions of body weight issues a barrier to teaching nutrition education?

When children hear adults expressing dissatisfaction with their bodies, they may begin to believe that being an adult means being unhappy or concerned with one's body. When they hear adults criticizing the bodies of some people or admiring the bodies of others, they may copy this behaviour by teasing other children about their bodies. You can support your students in accepting and loving their bodies, even when you aren't teaching nutrition!



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What Kind of Role Model are You? (cont'd)

The soul-searching questions below have no right or wrong answers. Exploring your responses will offer valuable insight into how you may be influencing children's beliefs about healthy eating and healthy body image.

- Am I dissatisfied with my body size and shape?
- Do I talk about my unhappiness with my body? Whom do I talk to, and who might overhear what I have to say?
- Am I always going on a diet or coming off a diet? Who knows when I'm on a diet and how do they know?
- Do I feel guilty when I eat certain foods? Do I refuse to eat certain foods while commenting that I am dieting to lose weight? Do I emphasize 'bad' foods versus 'good' foods?
- Why do I think children or adults become overweight?
- What do I think when I see an overweight child or adult? Do I tend to pay less attention to overweight children in my classroom? Do I give overweight parents the same amount of time and attention as I do parents who are not overweight?
- Have I ever been surprised when an overweight child, who I thought was not very bright, got a high grade on a standardized test? Has a parent ever complained that I was treating an overweight child unfairly in some way?

If you are concerned about some of your answers to the above questions, contact your health unit/department to speak to a health professional that is knowledgeable about healthy eating, body image and self-esteem issues.

Adapted from *Am I Fat? Helping Young Children Accept Differences in Body Size*, Joanne Ikeda and Priscilla Naworski, ETR Associates, 1992.



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