Proud To Be Me

Acknowledgements

We're on a mission to change beauty.

Will you join us?

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At Dove, we're on a mission to encourage young people to think positively about the way they look, enabling them to reach their full potential in life.

Around the world, young people struggle with accepting their appearance and face pressure to change the way they look. 2SLGBTQ+ youth may be especially vulnerable.

2SLGBTQ+ youth may experience greater body dissatisfaction and are also between 2 to 6+ times more likely to engage in disordered eating behaviors compared to their same-aged peers. Heteronormative expectations have overlooked the diverse experience of identities that do not fall into the binary, resulting in a lack of programming for queer youth within their formative years.

Sources: Austin, Nelson, Birket, Calzo, & Everett, 2013; Blashill & Safren, 2014; Calzo, Sonneville, Scherer, Jackson, & Austin, 2016; McClain & Peebles, 2016; Watson, Adjei, Saewyc, Homma, & Goodenow, 2017.

About this program

Proud To Be Me is a single session, two hour body image program designed for 2SLGBTQ+ youth and allies ages 12-14. In the program, youth will explore different sources of pressure to change their appearance and practice different skills to push back against the urge to conform to appearance norms.

Young people will practice with flexible ways of thinking about bodies and appearance that embraces diversity and celebrates every unique body. The goal of *Proud to Be Me* is to actively discuss appearance and bodies and what they can do for us to help build body confidence in a supportive group environment.

Proud to Be Me Development

Proud to Be Me was designed by body image and 2SLGBTQ+ experts and in tandem with queer youth to specifically address the experience of being young, queer, and authentic in the world. The goal is to encourage unique expression of the self, while also exploring the cultural messages and appearance pressures that can discourage being authentic.

Proud to Be Me is a research-informed intervention. It is based on other evidence-based body image programs for young people, for queer adults, and for broadly diverse populations. It has not been explicitly evaluated in research studies with queer youth; until there is more research on this program with 2SLGBTQ+ youth specifically, we recommend closely adhering to the facilitation recommendations below.

Theoretical foundation of *Proud To Be Me*

This research-based program leverages principles of psychology to create attitude and behavior change, particularly cognitive dissonance. When we act in a way that is inconsistent with our beliefs, we experience cognitive dissonance, or psychological discomfort. To help reduce this discomfort, we typically end up changing our beliefs to match our actions. Given the overwhelming appearance pressures in our society, many 2SLGBTQ+ young people develop the belief that they need to look a certain way to be valued, loved, and treated with respect. *Proud to Be Me* uses the power of dissonance for good to help young people to step out of their comfort zone to challenge societal messages that don't serve them – like the idea that all bodies are supposed to look the same! Through active participation in the verbal, written, and group-based activities in *Proud to Be Me,* 2SLGBTQ+ youth can find new ways to thrive, be authentic, and celebrate body diversity. It is important to tap into the foundations of the program, which are supported by research, by:

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+ **Ensuring that participation is voluntary.** Research shows that cognitive dissonance increases when people are participating because they want to. This increases buy in and helps young people attribute their responses challenging societal appearance ideals to their own beliefs (versus someone else's). Since *Proud to Be Me* relies on increasing dissonance, **it is important that young people choose to be part of this group** rather than being placed in the group automatically or without their choice. This is also why the program starts with a voluntary commitment – even though this activity can seem "cheesy" it is an important component of the group to enhance dissonance.

+ **Encouraging active participation and practice as much as possible.** It is important that each group member engages with the program as much as they can – participation creates the **cognitive dissonance!** This includes contributing to conversations and completing all exercises, including homework. Research shows us that active versions of the program work better than versions with less active participation. Some of the ideas in *Proud to Be Me* are very ingrained and can be hard to reconsider – e.g., critiquing diet culture and finding different ways to think about health. The individual members of any given group will be in different places in thinking about these topics, and it is important to balance the safety of group members with the potential for growth and change as they actively engage.

+ **Let young people lead the conversation.** Leaders should set up conversations and then let group members share their experiences as much as they can. The activities in *Proud to Be Me* are most effective when critiques – and solutions - are identified by group members.

Activities are designed to ask group members to share with each other – the perspective of peers is often influential for rethinking new ideas! For example, it is critical that youth generate the negative impacts/cons of the appearance ideals, rather than the group leader, to help produce cognitive dissonance and attitude change.

+ **Keep the conversation focused** on appearance as much as you can. While other important and relevant topics will come up (e.g., general self-esteem), this brief intervention was designed to improve body image and it is most effective when conversations focus on appearance, bodies, and finding compassion for diverse bodies in all forms. The great news is that research on similar programs supports that keeping the focus on body image and appearance can also improve self-esteem and general mood, even though they are not explicitly targeted in the program.

Ensure that you tell the participants that the program is meant to focus on appearance as the primary goal of the program

Importantly, participants should never focus on any benefits/pros of the appearance ideals, because this will undermine the effects of the program.

It is important to note that because these appearance pressures are so ingrained, challenging them is often uncomfortable, at least in the short term. However, research supports that this discomfort is temporary. Research also suggests that creating this dissonance is critical to the process of thinking differently and improving body image.

Facilitating the program

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## Program Structure

Groups are led by **1–2 leaders**.

While *Proud to Be Me* is delivered in a group format, **the program is designed to help each group member individually challenge** ingrained appearance ideals. Since everyone will be at a different place with challenging these appearance pressures, this program uses personalized language (e.g., "how would you respond?") to help youth answer in ways that would be most convincing and useful for them personally. Having group members externalize the content (e.g., think about "someone" versus thinking about their own experience) can lead to less dissonance and ultimately less improvement from the program.

Thus, the ideal group size is typically between **6–8 participants** to have a meaningful discussion and ensure that everyone can participate in any way accessible to them, as this is foundational to the program's success and what facilitates improved body image in individual young people.

Who should lead this program?

Ideally, leaders of *Proud to Be Me* should meet the following criteria. This is critical to help ensure that the content of this program is delivered in an effective, inclusive, and meaningful way for 2SLGBTQ+ youth.

+ Lived experience as a member of the 2SLGBTQ+ community

+ Group facilitation experience (preferably with youth)
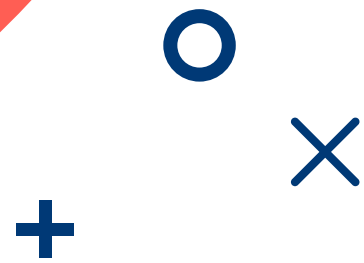
If leaders are not members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, they should have:

+ An existing relationship with queer youth advocacy (e.g., Gay Straight Alliance or Genders & Sexualities Alliance leader)

+ Identify as an ally to the queer community, or:

+ Have experience in 2SLGBTQ+ education

Training in Proud To Be Me

Ideally, program leaders should be trained directly by someone with expertise in this program (e.g., one of the developers).

A train-the-trainer model may be suitable for leaders who have significant experience facilitating groups within the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

Who should participate in this program?

Proud To Be Me should be delivered in spaces specifically dedicated to serving queer youth and allies (e.g., GSA programs, 2SLGBTQ+ clubs or youth centers).

It is important to include allies for this age range, since it invites participation for youth who may still be exploring their sexual and/or gender identity or who consider themselves to be advocates.

Program Length

Proud To Be Me is divided into several structured sections which should take **two hours** in total.

Before you begin

How to use this manual:

The text underlined reflects content that leaders should say or paraphrase.

Facilitation Tip
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These sections include information and tips or additional points that facilitators should cover within the section.

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Text in red reflects key actions to be taken.

. . . .

Supply checklist

+ Whiteboard and markers (or large pieces of poster paper and pens)

+ Sticky notes

+ Program handouts (x5)

Set up room for facilitation

+ Create a physical space where folks can see each other and talk to one another easily, while still being able to view notes made in the session (e.g., chairs in a circle)

+ Make sure everyone can view the whiteboard

General tips

Leaders are responsible not only for adhering to the protocol but also for managing group dynamics (e.g. developing a safe and inviting environment, facilitating conversation, and dealing with challenging participants).

Adhere as closely as possible to the leader script and recommended time limits to ensure that all topics are covered and are covered in sufficient detail.

Leaders should be familiar with the local political and social contexts that will influence the lived experiences of group members, including their perceptions of safety and support. Group conversations will change depending on who is in each group and the lived experiences they share, so be prepared to adjust the group content accordingly. For example:

+ In a group with many non-binary members, you may want to spend more time describing the androgynous ideal and its impact.

+ In a group with diverse racial identities, you may want to spend more time talking about sub-ideals related to racial identity or exploring the impact of dominant white ideals on group members of color.

+ In a group with disabled members, you may want to spend more time talking about the complexity of health and how ability is often assumed within conversations about ideal bodies.

When a participant shares personal information or discusses difficulties they have with body image, make empathic statements that show both compassion and appreciation for their contribution to the group (e.g., "It sounds like you are really struggling with this," or "That must have been hurtful when your mother/father said that comment to you about your weight"). Although it is extremely important to stay on track and cover the necessary information for each session, participants also want to feel heard and understood.

Leaders should be prepared to normalize and support the expected psychological discomfort that will arise as group members challenge themselves to think differently about bodies and appearance. Leaders should also be prepared to support group members who appear to struggle in more significant ways. Additional information about facilitation, including frequently asked questions and common difficult situations, are included in Appendix A.

Program Sessions

Let's get started ⟩⟩⟩

Timeline

Introduction | 5 mins

Voluntary commitment | 5 mins

Ideals | 30 mins

Impacts | 20 mins

Break | 10 mins

Roleplay | 20 mins

Activism | 15 mins

Session wrap-up | 15 mins

Introduction

🕐 **5 mins**

Introduce yourself and your pronouns. Let participants know that they can choose to share their pronouns or not, and that there is no obligation to do so.

Hi everyone. Welcome to *Proud To Be Me*. My name is_____and I'm one of your facilitators for today. My pronouns are_____.

Before we get started, we want to get to know all of you, too. How about we go around the circle and you can each tell us your name and if you'd like, your pronouns as well.

Go around the circle.

Thank you all for introducing yourselves. We're excited to get to know you more throughout this program and hear what you have to share.

This is a body acceptance program that discusses what affects body image concerns in the 2SLGBTQ+ community. What comes to mind when we think about how the diverse experiences of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community shape and celebrate body image journeys?

Facilitation Tip

>>> Since the question above allows for participants to share a range of opinions and comments, please ensure to direct the conversation back to body image if it strays away from that.

For those who don't know, body image refers to how you think and feel about your body shape, size, ability or overall way you look and what your body can do.

How do those things make you feel?

When it comes to things like (mention ideas the participants talked about; e.g. passing) and experiences like (e.g. gender dysphoria, gender euphoria). Your experience as a human is full of good things and bad. That doesn't change when you're part of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, but you may have different good and bad experiences such as gender dysphoria or gender euphoria. Our relationship with our body is continuous. Several factors will affect this and it is important that we are kind to ourselves. Some days you may feel one way and other days another way. This is a very human experience and this journey connects us all as we go through life.

Land acknowledgement

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As preparation for delivering this program, facilitators should do research to properly acknowledge the land that they are on. Visit native-land.ca (or similar sites) to learn more and write a land acknowledgement for your particular location. This is an example for the Toronto, Canada area:

Before we begin our workshop, we would like to acknowledge the land that we are currently on. We want to honour and express gratitude to the First Nations, Inuit and Metis people of Turtle Island who's sacred land we are on right now. This has been the site of human activity for 15,000 years.

This is the sacred traditional territory of the [refer to https://native-land.ca/] Today, the land that we are standing on is still the home to many of the First Nations, Inuit and Metis people from across Turtle Island.

It is our responsibility to remember our history, be aware of how it affects people today, and take care of this land we live and meet on.

Facilitation Tip

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+ Facilitators should express their own relationship to the land

+ Facilitators should try their best to speak with their own words opposed to script

+ Facilitators should try to connect the land acknowledgement to the content of the workshop and/or give some actionable next steps to learn more about or support Indigenous communities

Think critically

Why is it important for us to do this acknowledgement? How does it connect to our topic today?

Voluntary commitment & space agreement

⏱ 5 mins

Why this matters

+ The importance of creating a respectful and comfortable space where we can all speak freely and share our perspectives

+ The voluntary commitment is an important aspect of the program's theoretical foundation (see Facilitating the Program, above). This helps reinforce group members' commitment to actively participating and reminds them why this is important to them and their values

+ Tell participants where they can go for additional support either during or after the workshop

We find that people get the most out of these groups if they contribute to the conversation and complete all of the outside exercises. We also want to remind you that your participation is voluntary.

Are each of you willing to keep an open mind and give this program a try? Let's all go around the room and make a verbal agreement – I'll start... I am willing to keep an open mind and give this a try because....

Go around the circle and have each member state that they are willing.

Can acknowledge that this can feel somewhat awkward.

Facilitation Tip

》》》 We encourage group leaders to model this commitment and include briefly why this is important personally – for example, "I am willing to keep an open mind and give this a try because I really value community and I want to continue to learn ways to help challenge body image pressures in the 2SLGBTQ+ community."

Group rules

We will be talking about personal details of our lives in this group, and we want to hear diverse perspectives so we'll be asking everyone to share as much as you feel comfortable. It can be hard to open up and talk about personal things like pressures to change the way you look. One thing that might help us to have these conversations is if we agree to keep everything said in the group confidential. Obviously, you can discuss what you learned with other people, but personal information and stories should remain in this group. Does everyone agree to this?

Get general agreement from group.

Now let's set up some other group rules. What else would help to make this a space where you feel comfortable contribute respectfully, share our experiences, and be heard? Think about this for about a minute on your own and then let's come together to make a list on the board.

After 30 seconds to one minute:

What ideas do you have so far?

Let group members suggest ideas before jumping in.

Suggestions include

+ **No interrupting**

+ **Be respectful of what people contribute**

+ **Refrain from using derogatory language in reference to people's individual identities**

+ **Don't pretend that you know what something means- ask questions!**

+ **Give people room to say "wrong" things and grow**

+ **Validate others' contributions**

+ **Challenge yourself to understand and grow**

+ **No judgement: challenge ideas, not people**

+ **Active listening**

+ **Feel free to get up and leave the room if you need a short break from the conversation**

Does everyone agree to this list?

Get general agreement from group.

A note on experiencing discomfort

As we dive into our conversation for today, please keep these group rules in mind. We'd also like you to keep in mind that you may feel uncomfortable at times today. We'll be asking you to share your personal experiences so we can all feel less alone in any struggles we have, and learn from each other as we resist harmful messages and celebrate all bodies. It's not fun to feel uncomfortable, but we believe that some topics are so important that we should try and stumble through this discomfort together so we can learn and grow. However, please take care of yourself, and let a leader know if the conversation is too much or please take a short break if you need it. If you do need to step out, please give us a thumbs up so we know you are feeling fine. Otherwise, one of the leaders will come and check on you.

Facilitation Note

>>> Feel free to express the above statement in your own words if needed- the more genuine this section sounds, the better its impact.

Defining the appearance

⏱ **30 mins**

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Why this matters

Before youth can start to challenge an appearance ideal, they will need to understand what it is and where it comes from. They have been unconsciously affected by its damaging messages for years but might not have been aware of it. It's time to look at the appearance ideal consciously and critically.

You will need

+ Large piece of paper / whiteboard
+ Pens / markers

What happens

Participants brainstorm features of society's appearance ideals.

Let's get started >>>

Defining the "ideals"

Let's brainstorm what the "ideal femininity" looks like in western culture, recognizing the colonial roots. It is important to highlight that beauty standards vary across time and culture. The dominant culture in our society tends to send us very specific messages about what is attractive and what is less attractive. Think about the celebrities we see on social media as an example.

The media often portrays only masculine or only feminine, but you can identify with both or neither! Remember, gender is fluid! Can you think of any examples of typical gender stereotypes?

Possible responses include:

+ **Girls play with dolls vs. boys play with action figures**

+ **Girls wear pink vs. boys wear blue**

+ **Girls like princesses vs. boys like superheroes**

+ **Women cook, clean, and raise children vs. men are expected to get a job to bring home income for his family**

+ **Women shop for fun vs. men play sports for fun**

Facilitation Tip

>>> Leaders are encouraged to discuss concepts like colonialism, Westernized culture, and intersectionality here.

If you think about gender on a binary, it completely leaves out folks who might not feel like they're a man or a woman. This also suggests people are one or the other, but that isn't true.

It'll be helpful moving forward to think of gender identity existing on a spectrum rather than a binary.

Draw this on the board

Feminine ●————————————● Masculine

The concept that gender is located on a spectrum is not new. You can be on either two ends of it, anywhere in between, or completely outside of the line. For example, folks who are genderfluid might shift within the spectrum depending on how they feel.

Gender fluidity is not a new concept. For example, some Indigenous cultures around the world perceive gender differently than what we typically see in the society we live in the western world. In North America, there are Two-Spirits in Indigenous communities.

For example, Two-Spirit refers to a person who has both a masculine and feminine spirit with gender fluidity and is used by some Indigenous people to describe their sexual, gender and/or spiritual identity.

Overall, adhering to gender norms can be difficult and is something most people will face at some point throughout their life. Even cisgender folks can be affected by enforced gender norms.

Facilitation Tip

>>> See appendix for more information on Two-Spirit identity

Defining the "feminine ideal"

Arrange the group so that everyone can see the large piece of paper. Write "The Feminine Ideal" at the top.

First, let's describe the "perfect woman" according to our society.

One of the ways that gender gets socialized to us is through very specific messages about how we should LOOK (especially within a binary view of gender). While this won't capture the full gender spectrum and may not be relatable to all of us, it's important to name the dominant pressure around gendered appearance ideals in our society. We'll start by naming the just the binary gender categories on purpose ("men" and "women") – of course this does not reflect reality, but it's important to name because it can feel like you're supposed to be only masculine or feminine.

You don't have to agree with this, but think about what we are told "ideal femininity" looks like. You can also think of this as the physical ideal for femininity. What words or terms does society teach us to associate with femininity? These could be things you see in magazines or on social media, or maybe even things you've heard from your family and friends. Be as detailed as you can!

As participants call out features, write them down under "Ideal Femininity" heading. This list will show how detailed and limiting the appearance ideal can be.

Encourage the group to come up with as many physical features as possible. Prompt the group to make each feature very specific-- this emphasizes how narrow the ideal is.

For example, if someone says "perfect skin," ask them to describe what that looks like (e.g., no blemishes, no wrinkles, a glowing quality).

Facilitation Tip

To create dissonance, keep the conversation focused on physical appearance. If there is extra time, discuss non-physical attributes to the societal expectations of femininity as well. Mention that these "ideals" constantly change with time and across cultures.

Possible responses include:

+ **Thin and attractive**
  How thin? How attractive?

+ **Perfect body**
  Get details on each body part

+ **Toned physique**
  How toned? Muscular?

+ **Large breasts**
  How large?

+ **Tall**
  How tall?

+ **Flat stomach**
  Muscular or flat?

+ **Hair**
  Textured or smooth? Body hair?

+ **Age**
  Young or old?

+ **Tan but their race is white**

Facilitation Tip

You do not have to bring up all of these points; many of them will come up naturally in the conversation. Your role as a facilitator is to bring up points in this topic that may have been forgotten (e.g. the race of the ideal).

When you've filled the page and the group is out of ideas, step back.

So, society tells us that the perfect-looking woman has... (read through responses, highlight inconsistencies, e.g. thin but also large breasts). We call this the "feminine ideal".

Facilitation Tip

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Emphasize the overall importance placed on thinness within the feminine ideal.

Defining the "masculine ideal"

Now, what does "masculine ideal" look like?

Like before, you don't have to agree but what words or terms do you think of in association to masculinity? You can also think of this as the physical "ideal" for "masculinity."

As before, write down features as participants respond under "The masculine ideal" heading. This list will show how detailed and limiting the appearance ideal can be.

Possible responses include:

+ **Muscular or toned**
  How muscular? Which body parts?

+ **Perfect body**
  Get details on each part of body

+ **Broad Shoulders**
  How large?

+ **Tall**
  How tall?

+ **Facial characteristics**
  Strong jaw

+ **Hair**
  Length? texture? Facial hair? Body hair?

+ **Age**
  Young? Old?

+ **Skin complexion**
  Get details

So, society tells us that the perfect-looking man has... (read through responses, highlight inconsistencies, e.g. thin but also muscular). We call this "The Masculine Ideal".

Facilitation Tip

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Emphasize the overall importance placed on muscularity within the masculine ideal. Take some time to lead grounding exercises in case any of the conversations around ideals have been triggering. Please refer to appendix B for grounding exercises.

Navigating around the gender binary

As we talked about before, these ideals reference body parts of cisgender men and women and promote thinking about gender as a binary, masculine vs. feminine, boys vs. girls. Because of how our society is set up, we are forced to fit into the binary box of either feminine or masculine. However, what is important is that we live our authentic self and we are comfortable in our own skin.

If we think beyond the gender binary, who can we include?

Possible responses include

+ **Some transgender people**

+ **Nonbinary people**

+ **Genderfluid people**

+ **Intersex people**

+ **Anyone who identifies differently than male or female**

Facilitation Tip

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It is important to highlight that there are trans folk who **do** and **do not** fit into the binary.

We can see that this binary is very restrictive. How might it feel to be left out or to be forced into a category that doesn't fit who you are?

Possible responses include

+ **It doesn't feel good**

+ **Feel like you're not good enough**

So we can see how thinking about gender on a binary might make us feel not good about ourselves, and how thinking about gender on a spectrum instead is more accurate and supportive. It's important to also clarify the difference between gender identity and sexual orientation because they often intersect with one another.

Your **gender identity** is how you personally think about yourself and how you want to be perceived. Your gender expression is how you choose to present yourself to the people around you and could include the way you dress, makeup, hairstyles, etc. Gender expression does not equate to gender identity. **Sexual identity** describes who an individual is attracted to. It's important to know the difference and also know that while they can intersect with each other, both gender and sexuality should be thought of on a spectrum.

Facilitation Tip

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You can use visuals to explain these new concepts. For example, refer to the gender identity spectrum again or draw a similar one to explain sexual identity.

Reflect

Facilitate a brief discussion with the group around these questions:

What other identities are included in the ideals, and what else could be added to reflect the reality of diverse bodies in the world?
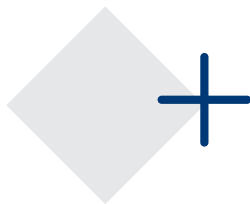
Possible responses include:

People of different:

+ Races

+ Ethnicities

+ Genders

+ Sexual orientations

+ Body sizes

+ Abilities

+ Ages

Facilitation Tip

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This is a good point in the program to elaborate if you need space. This is also a good spot to allow for group members to expand the conversation as needed depending on their identities and lived experiences. After participants respond, you should bring up identities that they have not mentioned.

Where do you think these appearance ideals come from based on experience? How do we learn about them?

Possible responses include:

+ Social media
(Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Twitter, Twitch, Netflix/Hulu)

+ Family and friends

+ Television and magazines

+ The internet and online ads

+ Fashion industry, diet industry etc.

How does pressure to match these appearance ideals make you feel?

Possible responses include:

+ Feels awful to be on the outside

+ Anxious or depressed

+ Not good enough

+ Shy

+ Negative about self in general

What are we told will happen if we look like these ideals? Is that true?

Possible responses include:

+ Be more popular

+ Happier

+ More successful

+ In a relationship

+ No, it is not true.

Clarifying the healthy ideal

Before we talk about this some more, it is important to talk about something called the "healthy ideal."

The **healthy ideal** is different for everyone – it's how your unique body looks when you do things to support your physical health, mental health, and overall quality of life. This can include eating lots of different food to fuel your body, exercising, and engaging in school, social activities, and other things you value. The focus here is really on how your body feels on the inside and works to get you through each day, not just about how your body looks. Health is complex and individual for every person, and it also comes in all shapes and sizes including fat and disabled, and other bodies that are often dismissed by society as unhealthy based on appearance alone. There also are aspects of health that are outside of our control, so it is important to not idealize a status but to focus on actions we take to give our bodies what they need. It's also important to recognize that not everyone can be healthy – e.g., think about chronic illness, disability, or difference. A really important part of health is recognizing that every person deserves to have their well-being supported, no matter how they look or their health status.

Facilitation Tip

It may be important to acknowledge to group members that being fat and using the word "fat" is okay. However, everyone deserves the right to describe their own body without others doing it for you. Fat is not inherently bad despite the cultural messages that tell us it is. In reality, people of all shapes and sizes deserve happiness, equal access, and inclusion.

Your **body image** is how you think and feel about how your body looks and functions. It's important to note that your body image changes and is not fixed. How you view your body can change within the day and also throughout your lifetime. For example, you may love your body one day and feel bad about it the next. Your body may confuse the way you think about your gender identity, and your identity itself might change many times.

It can sometimes be helpful to think about the idea of **body neutrality**, which is treating your body with kindness and compassion even if you are not happy with how it looks or how it functions. All bodies deserve this respect, which can start with finding value in what your body does do for you. For example, our bodies may allow us to be creative, communicate with others, and share community with the people we love. Our bodies keep us alive, help us enjoy activities, and let us experience the world.

Key words summary

Healthy Ideal

How your body feels on the inside and works to get you through each day.

Body Image

How you think and feel about how your body looks and functions.

Body Neutrality

When you don't have negative or positive ideals about your own or others bodies.

Gender Dysphoria

The feelings of discomfort or stress that can occur in people whose gender identity differs from their sex assigned at birth.

Gender dysphoria, which describe the feelings of discomfort or distress that can occur in people whose gender identity differs from their sex assigned at birth, body neutrality can be really helpful. It's important that we highlight that someone who experiences gender dysphoria does not necessarily hate their body; instead, they may imagine changes that would make their body feel more affirming. Others may not wish to change their body at all. It can be helpful to fixate on the parts of your body that do make you feel good. This doesn't have to relate to appearance, but rather can also be related to functionality.

Can you all think of parts of your body that make you feel good or engaged in the world? If you're comfortable sharing, why does that part of your body make you feel good? For example, my legs allow me to run really fast which makes me feel good about my body, or my nose helps me smell the flowers in spring which makes me feel good about the world around me.

What parts of your body make you feel good about yourself?

Possible responses include:

+ **My teeth let me chew food**

+ **My hands let me play with toys**

+ **My stomach because my cat likes to lay on it**

+ **My height allows me to reach things up high, etc.**

We talked about how the appearance ideals are narrow and very unrealistic. It's also important to acknowledge that the ideals are constantly changing in terms of what is popular or trendy. It's a waste of time and energy to try and pursue the dominant appearance ideals in our society. This is why this program places a focus on the healthy ideal, which highlights all shapes and sizes and is individual and flexible. The healthy ideal focuses on being authentically yourself, embracing body diversity, and recognizing that health looks and feels different for everyone.

Facilitation Tip

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It is important not to convey that trying to be healthy is bad – continue to make a distinction between the healthy ideal (engaging in eating a variety of foods and exercise behaviors to promote overall health) and the feminine or masculine ideal (striving for an unrealistic "look" by whatever means necessary). As noted above, we want to ensure that we differentiate between appearance ideals and healthy ideals and ensure that we are being thoughtful about how we define or have participants define "health." Sometimes people can use the word "healthy" as a socially acceptable way of saying "thin" or "lean," which has colonial origins and pushes narrow and western definitions of health. We want to really avoid that in this program and ensure that we are reinforcing that people can be healthy in any body.

Impacts of pursuing ideals

🕐 **20 mins**

Why this matters

It's not enough to know that the appearance ideal exists. Within the 2SLGBTQ+ community, there are often sub-ideals that can have people feeling excluded or that they are not enough. To help youth build both body acceptance and confidence, we need to encourage them to speak up about the impacts of chasing the ideal and how being free from it can make them happier and healthier.

This section is also the first to include dissonance-based elements that research supports are critical to the program's success. This is the start of helping group members actively challenge what is harmful about chasing the appearance ideal and is an important activity. Accordingly, we want to make sure that the group comes up with a long and comprehensive list of the impacts chasing the appearance ideal.

You will need

+ *Impacts* handout
+ Pens

What happens

In this activity, participants come up with a long list of impacts associated with chasing the appearance ideal. They think about how ideals impact an individual in terms of personal health, relationships, finance and achievements, and how they impact society in general.

Let's get started
»»»

Thinking about impacts

>>>

Pass out *impacts* handout before starting this section.

Trying to look like the appearance ideal has major impacts on people and society as a whole. What would you be giving up if you tried to look like the ideals? What challenges would you face?

On your handout, write down some things that would happen if you or someone you know chased these ideals and in a few minutes we'll come back together and share. These can be general ideas like lower self-esteem or specific things like not feeling like you can wear the clothes you want.

Give a few minutes to write down ideas.

Possible responses include:

+ **Losing money**

+ **Gender dysphoria**

+ **Decreased self-worth**

+ **Expensive**

+ **Physically and mentally exhausting**

+ **Can cause health problems**

+ **Encourages unhealthy weight management**

+ **Depression or anxiety**

+ **Eating disorders / not enjoying food**

+ **Not having fun with friends**

+ **Being unhappy**

+ **Avoiding specific activities**

Facilitator Tip

>>>

It is important to clarify for group members that the impacts are multifaceted and do not have to be (and are often not) monetary. It can be social, emotional, physical, spiritual, etc. Pursuing the ideal can also impact school performance, broader mental health, and reinforce weight bias. Encourage the group to think about some of these categories if they get stuck.

Let's go around the group and name some of these costs.

▶▶▶▶▶▶▶

▶▶▶▶▶▶▶

Facilitation Tip

>>>

When asking the next few questions, tailor them to the answers that participants gave. For example, if someone mentions eating disorders, connect that idea by talking about mental health and health in general.

When discussing difficult mental health topics, it is important to note that it does not equate to cost or being a failure of someone chasing ideals. Instead, mental health challenges can occur in a variety of different ways.

These are all great answers. Let's go into this idea a little bit more in depth.

How do these ideals affect your health?

What does chasing the appearance ideals do to your time and others?

How would trying to change our appearance to fit the ideals make us feel about ourselves?

Possible responses include:

+ **People aren't fully engaged in their own or others lives**

+ **Overall these ideals make most people feel negative feelings about their body**

+ **The internalized transphobia we may gain from these ideals can affect other trans people in our lives that we care about, etc.**

Facilitation Tip

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Again, you don't need to touch on all these ideas, facilitators should use their best judgment with acknowledging what identities are present in the group and if certain identities are not being talked about.

Let's take a moment to ground ourselves, take some deep breaths and allow ourselves to return to the conversation if it was difficult to get through. How are we feeling right now?

Impact to the 2SLGBTQ+ community
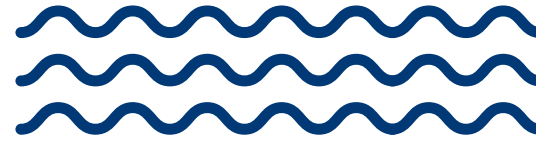
Members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community are often additionally impacted by ideals. We've talked about pressures of the masculine and feminine ideals, but there are often harmful stereotypes in the media about what a 2SLGBTQ+ person "should" look like. For example, stereotypes about gay men are often portrayed as more feminine while lesbian women are seen as more masculine. What are other examples that you have seen, maybe on TV or in other media?

Those are really good examples of these harmful stereotypes. Even within the 2SLGBTQ+ community itself, there might be different stereotypes and expectations about ideal bodies. There is a stereotype that trans folk need to medically transition and that all trans folk want to personally medically transition. There's also constant erasure in the media for other sexual identities; for example, bisexual and pansexual people are rarely talked about.

Raise your hand if you can think of a show or movie where they accurately represent bisexuality or pansexuality.

Wait for response.

See? Not many, right? While gender identity and sexuality can intersect with one another, these stereotypes can actually be really harmful. However, there are still some positive and affirming queer representation out there fighting alongside with us!

How do you think it would feel to be a part of the 2SLGBTQ+ community and not see

Possible responses include:

+ **Alone**

+ **Excluded**

+ **Alienated**

+ **That you're not good enough**

+ **Invalidated in your identity because it doesn't fit the model we see through media**

+ **You could strive for the ideals even more as a result**

Facilitation Tip
>>>

+ It's important to highlight not all trans folk medically transition and not all trans folk experience gender dysphoria.

+ The acronym 2SLGBTQ+ is used above, facilitators should use their own judgement if it would make more sense to use a different acronym or word (e.g. LGBT+ LGBTQ+, etc.) If facilitators are unsure, ask the group what acronyms/words they are comfortable using.

Thinking more about the 2SLGBTQ+ community, it's important that we talk about people who are transgender who do fit into the binary. "Passing" refers to whether someone is perceived as female or male. Passing may mean different things to different people. Some folks would like to fit into the binary, but it is important to remember that gender expression is based on a spectrum.

Why do you think someone might want to pass?

Possible responses include:

+ **So they don't have their gender invalidated**

+ **Their pronouns are misused**

For many trans folks, there's a stereotype that you need to "pass" to validate your identity, but this simply isn't true. Additionally, someone might want to pass for safety reasons. It is important to acknowledge that these ideals we talked about can often have a stronger pressure on transgender individuals for various reasons. You can "pass" without looking like the ideals we've discussed.

Can you think of what someone who is trans might experience when trying to achieve these ideals?

Possible responses include:

+ **Gender dysphoria**

+ **Gender euphoria stricter ideals which can oftentimes be more unattainable**

+ **You might feel like you're not "trans enough"**

+ **High rates of eating disorders among trans youth**

+ **Loss of family and friends, etc.**

What happens if we do not follow the expectations from society around 'passing'?

Possible responses include:

+ **You shouldn't have to meet the ideals to be valid in your identity.**

+ **Your gender identity would still be valid regardless of what society says.**

Reflect

Given this long list of costs, who benefits from the ideals? Who makes money when people try to pursue them?

Possible responses include:

+ **The media**

+ **The fashion industry**

+ **Diet/weight loss/fitness industry**

+ **Beauty industry**

Are we part of the group that benefits?

Possible response:

No, we're not profiting off of people trying to achieve these ideals.

Now that we know all the ways that chasing these unrealistic ideals can impact us, is it worth it to aggressively pursue the appearance ideal?

Possible response:

No, it doesn't make sense.

Facilitation Tip

>>>

If participants say "yes," you can respond by asking them to help name a cost from the discussion – this also will be consistent with the next request from the full group. For example, if someone says yes – there are still some benefits, you could say something like, "So you've identified some benefits of the ideal – what stands out as the biggest cost or reason why chasing the ideal doesn't make sense?".

e.g. *"Your physical and mental health is not worth doing all of this"* or *"People at school who are worth hanging out with will accept and love you as you are"* or *"the journey of finding yourself is constantly changing and can be a wonderful experience."*

As we can see, these ideals take so much from you. Let's go around the room so that each of us can share one reason why pursuing society's ideals doesn't make sense. This can be as simple as saying "it's impossible to achieve" or "the negative impacts are too high".

Go around circle.

Thanks for sharing, everyone. Remember that there is no perfect look and no perfect body type. We should appreciate and take care of our bodies because it does wonderful things for us. For example, it allows us to smell the grass when it's being cut, or touch a soft blanket.

Speaking out against the appearance ideal isn't about criticizing anyone's natural body or features, or the choices people make about their appearance. It's about challenging the idea in society that there's one perfect way to look, and the pressure this idea puts on people. Also, be mindful that it's impossible to naturally achieve the ideal; even models and celebrities need surgery and Photoshop to match it. Chasing the ideal, and what this does to you, is the problem. .

Break

10 mins
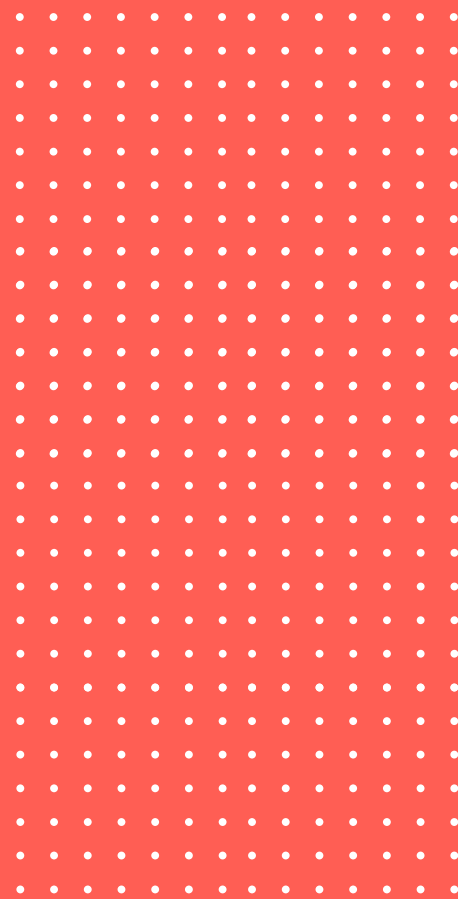
Challenging Body Talk

⏱ **20 mins**

+

O

03

Why this matters

Practicing how to challenge the appearance ideal in everyday conversation gives kids a way to do it in real life. By giving them the tools to counter the appearance ideal, they become less engaged in trying to chase it and their body confidence improves.

You will need

✚ Large poster paper

✚ Sticky notes

✚ *Body Talk List* handout

What happens

On the whiteboard, write the five negative body talk statements. Pass out five sticky notes to each kid. Everyone will write down a response to each of the statements. When they finish, they will stick their responses on the board. One of the facilitators will review the responses and can correct any that may still support the ideal. Then, each participant can pick one response to say out loud– this can be any statement, it does not have to be the one that that individual wrote.

Let's get started

>>>

Negative body talk

>>>

Pass out *Body Talk List* handout before starting this section.

As we've said throughout this program, there are so many ways that these ideals are found in our daily lives. Often, comments about our bodies come up in conversations with friends or family. Sometimes other people bring them up, and sometimes we are the ones that bring them up about ourselves. Our goal in this section is to challenge negative body talk, but also remember that not all talk about our bodies is negative.

Your first handout in today's packet is a list of common statements people make that subtly support the bodies within society's ideals. This is called the "Body Talk List." Please take a moment to read these statements to yourself.

Give group a few minutes to read over list.

Facilitation Tip

>>>

For the upcoming activity, pick six statements from each of the different categories below (for a total of **six** statements) for participants to practice responding to.

Muscularity

+ Real men have muscles.
+ My arms aren't toned enough.
+ Wow, he is so ripped!
+ I'm too scrawny.

Gender identity

+ My mom says short hair is only for boys.
+ Why is that boy wearing makeup?
+ What are you, a girl or a boy?
+ Girls should have curves.

Sexual identity

+ Why did you cut your hair so short, are you a lesbian?
+ He has such a great fashion sense, he must be gay.
+ You don't look queer.

Healthy/unhealthy food-related

+ I can't eat that; it will make me fat.
+ If you want to lose weight you should try eating healthier.
+ I'm not going to eat so I can look good for the day.
+ I need to stop eating junk food so I can lose weight.

Thinness

+ I wish I could be as skinny as you.
+ I'm too scrawny.
+ How are you so thin?
+ She's way too skinny; it's not cute.

Anti-fat

+ You look great! Have you lost weight?
+ They're too big to be wearing those pants.
+ You'd be more attractive if you lost weight.
+ They really let themselves go.

Use these prompts below to focus the conversation.

Facilitation Note

⟫⟫ Add that comments that seem like "compliments" can also be unhelpful as they sometimes have roots in fatphobia, racism, and more.

01 How do the statements on this list support the appearance ideals?

Possible responses include:

+ The statements encourage the idea that skinnier is prettier
+ That muscular is better, and promote negative body talk
+ They enforce gender roles

02 How might these statements make someone feel if they do not fit into the gender binary?
(Specifically gender based statements)

Possible responses include:

+ They may feel like they're dressing or expressing themselves the "wrong" way
+ They might feel like who they really are is not acceptable
+ On top of normal body-related pressures, they're being told that their identity is "wrong"

03 How would your feelings toward your body change if you stopped talking this way?

Possible responses include:

+ I would appreciate myself more
+ I would be nicer to myself, less critical
+ I'd be happier, feel better or even just okay
+ I'd be able to enjoy the food I like to eat
+ I would feel comfortable enough to wear what I want

04 If you stopped making statements on this list, how might it affect others around you?

Possible responses include:

+ They might stop making these statements too
+ People would feel less judged and free to express themselves
+ We'd create a more positive environment for everyone
+ We would all feel more accepted

05 So how can we continue a conversation without Body Talk? Or what could we talk about instead of our or other people's appearance?

Possible responses include:

+ Comment on things we value about others that don't include appearance (personality, being smart, kind, etc.)
+ Think about qualities and interests that make you or others unique and focus on those
+ Talk about shared interests outside of appearance

06 What can you do to change the conversation when someone does start to Body Talk?

Possible responses include:

+ Change the subject to something else if body talk comes up
+ Let people know this kind of talk makes you feel uncomfortable
+ Challenge people to think about why body talk is harmful

It can be hard to change the conversation when people use Body Talk. **We'll do a mini role-play game to practice with this**.

Facilitators will perform an example role play so participants can understand what is expected from the activity. Pass out sticky notes to each participant.

On this poster, we have five Body Talk statements from the handout list. You are all going to respond to each of these statements in a way that shows that you do not support the ideals. For example, if I say "that person is HUGE" what could you say in response?

Get at least one example from the group.

Okay, that is what you would write on your post-it. Then, you'll stick it under the statement you're replying to. After you've responded to all of them, we'll group back up and go over the statements together. Does that make sense?

Let's take a look at some of the responses we have.

Correct any that may still support the ideals.

Okay, now that we've gone through some of these together, we want you to each take a turn reading one of these responses out loud. It does not have to be one of the ones that you wrote yourself, but it can be if you'd like.

Let me know which statement you're responding to, I'll read it out loud, and you can read out the reply. Does that make sense? Would anyone like to go first?

Thank you all for participating. We know it can be really hard to hear these statements even in a roleplay type of setting. How are we all feeling about the body talk? You've all done a great job at fighting against the ideals by practicing these responses.

We hope that by doing this, you'll all be more comfortable speaking out against body talk.

Facilitation Tip

>>>

Names will not be on the post-its so there is no need to call out anyone specifically. Work together as a group to craft a statement that better rejects the ideal.

For example, if the statement is "I'm too scrawny" and someone responds "No, you're not!" a better response might be, "It's normal to have negative feelings about your body sometimes, but remember you are more than just how your body looks."
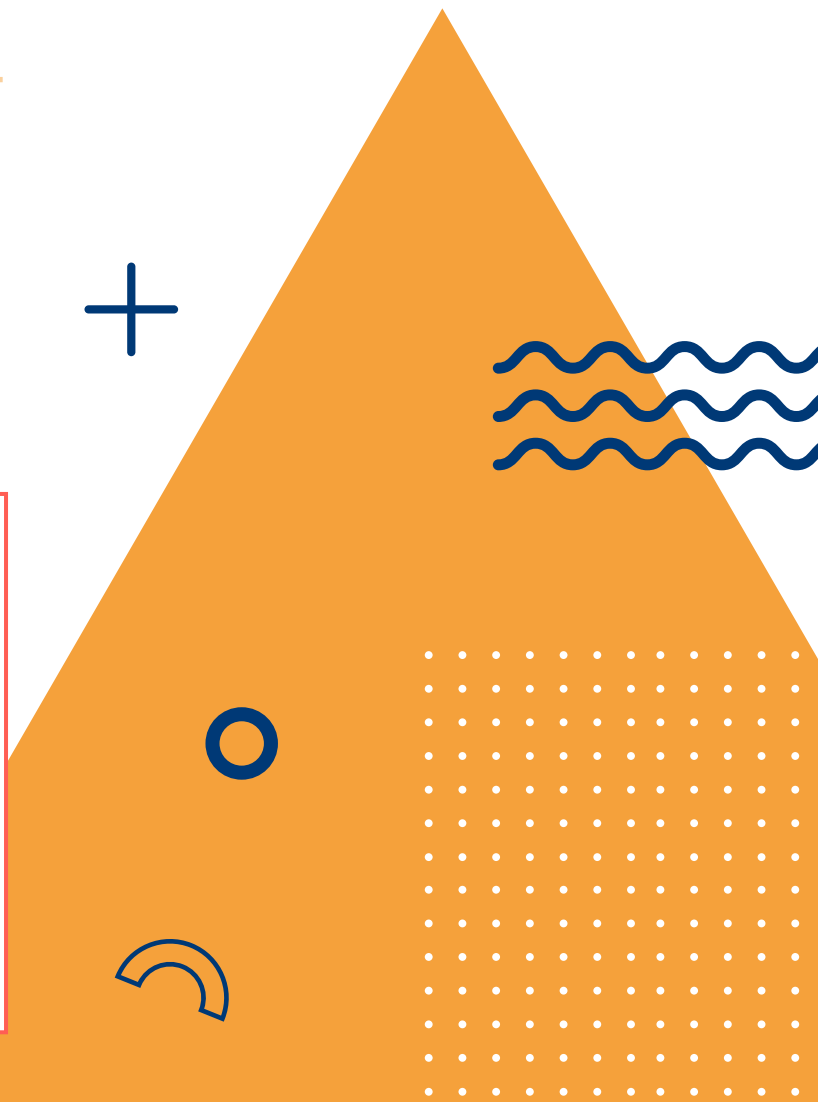
Body Activism

⏱ **15 mins**

04

Why this matters

Body acceptance is a social issue. By becoming body acceptance activists, youth get to practice voicing their own rejection of the appearance ideal and help others feel less pressured to chase it, creating more accepting communities.

You will need

+ Paper
+ Pens
+ *Body Activism* handout

What happens

After brainstorming with the group, youth choose a simple action that will allow them to share what they've learned from this program with others.

Let's get started >>>

Pressures to conform

>>>

Pass out *Body Activism* handout before starting this section.

Let's think about the 2SLGBTQ+ community once again. This is a braver and safer space where you all can support one another. It's important to remember that while you may never be able to fully control what other people do outside of this room, you can trust each other in this group. We are all here to listen, understand, and validate one another. This is a space where we've all come together to make a difference and we want you to leave this group with some creative ways that you can make changes to your community.

So, remember what we discussed about the ideals, the way that they're not representative of many people, and why we can feel pressured to conform to them.

What could you do to open the eyes of your friends and family, and even your wider community like your school, to the things you've learned today about the appearance ideal and the importance of body acceptance?

Activism

Doing something that will change your environment, community, or even world in a way that will benefit others.

Possible responses include:

+ **Have discussions with family members and friends**

+ **Don't laugh at jokes when they're directed at the expense of another person**

+ **Practice the golden rule – treat others how they want to be treated**

So, how can you be a body activist and share what you've learned with other people to battle these appearance ideals in the 2SLGBTQ+ community? This might seem like something that's not possible for you to do as one person, but the truth is that every single one of you is capable of making a difference.

For example, we could post an unedited and unfiltered picture of ourselves on social media or make a pact with our friends to avoid talking badly about our bodies. That changes the world around us in a positive way. What are other ways could we do this?

Write down some ideas on your piece of paper and we'll share our answers in a few minutes.

Let's have everyone share two items from their list. Would anyone like to go first?

Have participants share.

Facilitation Tip

>>>

Sometimes the concept of body activism can be a little confusing and group members may share wonderful personal body image challenges, but these may not be activism activities as they do not impact others around them. To keep this activity focused on body activism, leaders should help clarify this point when needed. Often any personal challenge can be changed into an activism activity by sharing what you are doing with a friend or other person around you. For example, avoiding social media because you realize it impacts your body image and promotes negative comparisons is a personal activity, but can be changed into and activism activity by sharing why you are doing this with a friend or asking a group of friends to do this along with you for these reasons.

These are really awesome ideas! Thank you for sharing them with us.

Here are some other things that we didn't list that you could do as well:

Body activism ideas:

+ **Think about what content you watch and what creators/influencers you follow on social media - are you following people of different races, ethnicities, genders, sexualities, abilities, etc.**

+ **Ask yourself, do the people you follow on social media make you feel good about yourself and your body?**

+ **Put positive post-it notes up saying "you look great the way you are" on mirrors or walls in your home in a public space**

+ **Put out a pail with sidewalk chalk and a sign that tells people to write down something they like about their appearance on the sidewalk**

+ **Share body-positive content on social media, this could be an Instagram post, a YouTube video, a TikTok video, etc.**

+ **Make comments about what you like about a person that is NOT appearance-related (e.g., "Lucy is kind, thoughtful, funny, smart, creative, etc.")**

+ **Create content on social media (TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, etc.) on body positivity**

+ **Post unedited photos of yourself on social media**

+ **Talk to a friend or family member about diversity and representation in the media**

>>>

>>>

- **Make a pact with a friend to avoid talking badly about your body**

- **Putting messages in magazines that challenge the appearance ideal**

- **Change your media consumption to things that are body positivity or that help you boost your body confidence**

- **Be more aware of AI generated images online and be transparent and mindful when I use AI to generate images of myself or others**

Reflect

Thank you all again for sharing!

Even though we see these ideals everywhere in our culture, there are ways we can fight them.

Remember that it is possible for every single person to make a difference, including each of you. It is really important that we as individuals reject the ideal and help others do the same so that we can create more accepting communities.

We'd like to invite you all to become body activists by doing at least two of these acts over the next two weeks. Would you be willing to do that?

Get general agreement from the group.

Great! Let's go around the group again and share one of the things we're going to do.

Facilitation Tip

>>>

If group members are interested in doing something, but having a hard time deciding what to do, this can be a great time to help them brainstorm and get feedback from the group. Additionally, if the group has expressed discomfort with sharing throughout the workshop, the sharing circle can be replaced with a post-it note activity, with the participants sharing their comments on the notes instead. However, verbal sharing is important to ensure dissonance is achieved, so kindly prioritize the sharing circle if possible.

Session wrap-up

⏱ **15 mins**   ↗

05

Mirror Exercise Homework

>>>

Pass out *Mirror Exercise Homework* handout before starting this section.

Before we end this workshop, we also would like to ask you to do something called the "Mirror Exercise" before next week.

This involves finding some time to stand in front of a mirror—wearing as little clothing as possible or something that makes you feel comfortable—and write down at least 15 things you like about yourself. This includes physical, emotional, intellectual, and social qualities. For example, you might like the shape of your arms, your strong legs, your dark hair, your laugh, or your humor.

Please make sure to include at least some physical qualities on your list. Don't forget that sometimes we like body parts because of the way we look, and other times we like them because of what they allow us to do. For example, you may say "I really like the shape of my legs" or "I appreciate that my legs can help me run fast."

The Mirror Exercise may feel silly or be hard to do at first, but we really want you to do this because it is important to recognize each of these strengths about yourself. People who have done this in the past have found it to be very helpful and empowering.

When I did this exercise, I really enjoyed it because _____
Make statement about why you found this helpful.

Please use your Mirror Exercise worksheet to complete this activity. Please bring your worksheet with the list of positive qualities next week. We will ask you to share something on your list and we will collect your worksheet.

Facilitation Tip

>>>

Mirror time makes the most impact when kids can identify body image characteristics that are very personal or meaningful to them. But if they aren't comfortable doing this alone or you're worried they won't be able to identify things they like about themselves, suggest:

+ Trying it with a friend they trust. They can encourage each other to identify positive traits and give examples of things they like about each other.

+ Encourage participants to start small with the physical traits if struggling and to build up to more prominent features when they're ready.

+ Thinking about things their bodies enable them to do, not just what they look like.

+ Looking at just their face, hands, or other parts of their body that feel approachable, rather than their whole body.
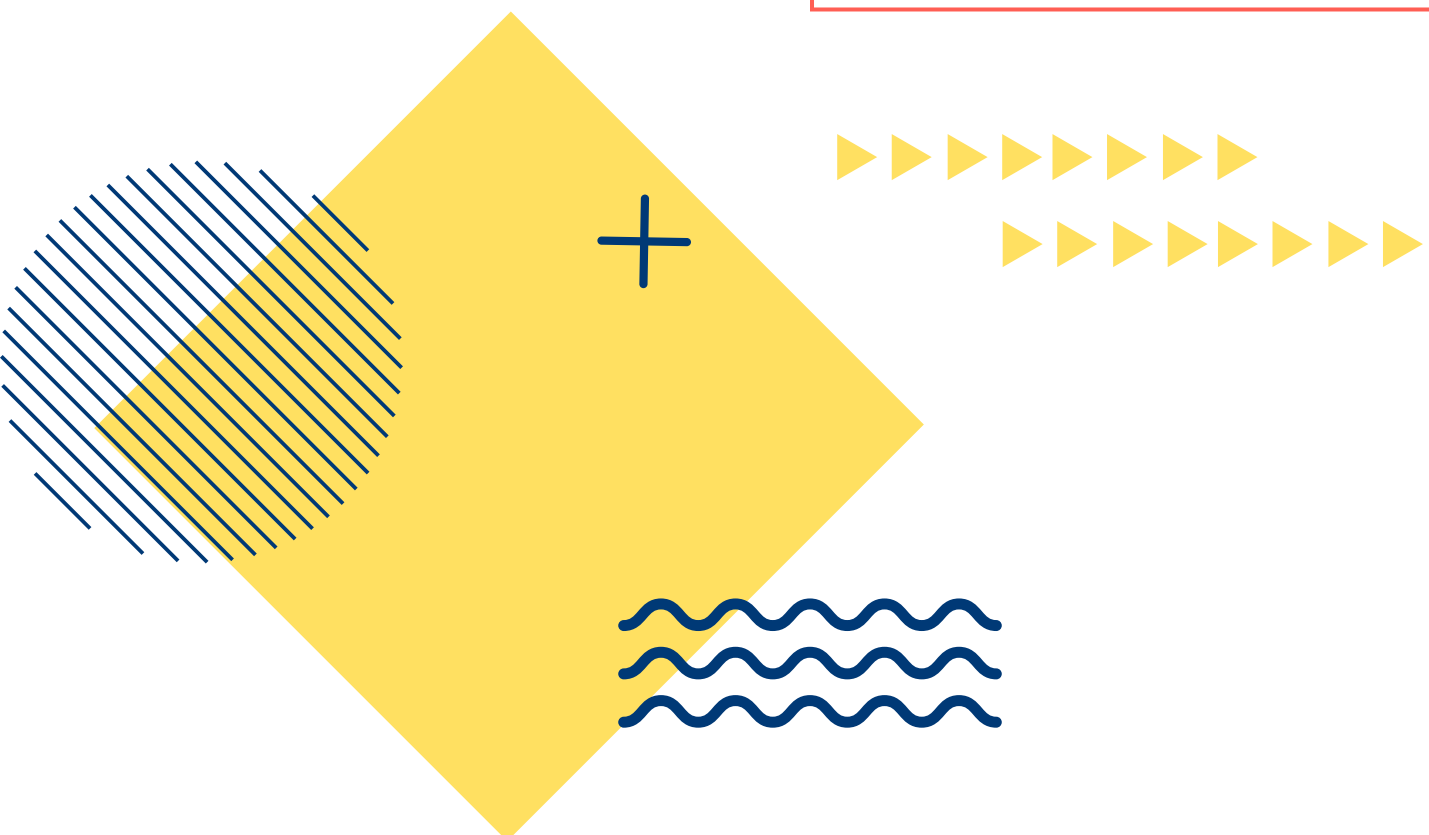
To summarize

Over the next few weeks you will have two different home exercises: first, you will engage in two Body Activism activities and second, you will do the Mirror exercise.

You can think of these as "exit exercises" and we encourage you to try and complete them all because we believe they will help you work toward improving your own appearance confidence and creating a positive and accepting culture around you.

Does everyone agree to do these exercises?

Get general agreement.

Before we end our discussion today, we want to give each of you an opportunity to say one last thing. It could be something you liked, learned, something you didn't get to say but wanted to, reflections, basically anything.

Let's go around the circle and, if you are comfortable, please share one thought or feeling that you are leaving our session with today.

Once again, we'd like to thank you for deciding to be a part of this group. We've been very impressed with your thoughtful comments and participation! We hope that you use what you've learned here today to help create a more accepting world around you.

›››
Pass out *Evaluation* handout and encourage students to give honest feedback about how they found the program.

Program Handouts

Recommended Evaluation Questions

We recommend giving a handout for youth to complete after their program. These questions ask about their experiences in the program and its impact on body image.

Costs of chasing the ideals

Activity Sheet

>>>

Please list as many costs to pursuing feminine or masculine appearance ideals as you can think of:

Body Talk List

- They really let themselves go.

- How are you so thin?

- I need to stop eating junk food so I can lose weight.

- What are you, a girl or a boy?

- Real men have muscles.

- I wish I could be as skinny as you.

- Wow, he is so ripped!

- My mom says short hair is only for boys.

- I'm not going to eat so I can look good for the day.

- If you want to lose weight you should try eating healthier.

- Why is that boy wearing makeup?

- Girls should have curves.

- You'd be more attractive if you lost weight.

- You look great! Have you lost weight?

- I'm too scrawny.

- They're too out of shape to be wearing a swimsuit.

- She's way too skinny; it's not cute.

- They're too big to be wearing those pants.

- I can't eat that; it will make me fat.

- My arms aren't toned enough.

Body Activism

Activity Sheet

>>>

Generate a list of things people can do to resist the appearance ideals on a larger scale.

What can you avoid, say, do, or learn to battle the narrow, non-inclusive appearance ideals?

01 _____

02 _____

03 _____

04 _____

05 _____

06 _____

07 _____

08 _____

09 _____

10 _____

11 _____

12 _____

13 _____

14 _____

15 _____

Circle the two activities you plan to do over the next two weeks as an Exit Exercise.

Mirror Exercise Homework

Activity Sheet >>>

01 **Wear something you can look at your body in.**

02 **Find a quiet space with a mirror in it.**

We often use mirrors to criticize ourselves. Let's try to see things differently and use the mirror to reflect the things we like about us!

Find a full length mirror if you can so you can see your whole body.

03 **While looking at the mirror, think about positive things about yourself. List at least 15 qualities.**

Try to think of physical traits first, then non-physical. For example, you may like your legs or your sense of humor or your accomplishments outside of school. Please make sure to include at least some physical attributes on your list.
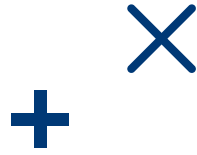
Program Evaluation

Thank you for being part of Proud To Be Me. **Your honest feedback is valuable as it helps us to continue to improve the program.**

What is your current gender identity?

- ◯ Cisgender girl/woman
- ◯ Cisgender boy/man
- ◯ Transgender girl/woman
- ◯ Transgender boy/man
- ◯ Non-binary
- ◯ Genderqueer
  (Neither only female nor only male)
- ◯ If the above options do not describe you, please specify a term that does:

  _____

Which of the following best describes you?

- ◯ Lesbian
- ◯ Gay
- ◯ Bisexual
- ◯ Pansexual
- ◯ Queer
- ◯ Questioning
- ◯ Asexual
- ◯ Straight
- ◯ If the above options do not describe you, please specify a term that does:

  _____

Which activity or part of the program was especially helpful for you?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Did anything in this program make you feel uncomfortable?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Do you have any suggestions for improving the program?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

What did you think about *Proud To Be Me?*

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
01	I enjoyed this program	○	○	○	○	○
02	The program was relevant to my life and experiences	○	○	○	○	○
03	The activities were helpful	○	○	○	○	○
04	The activities helped me to understand how body image pressures impact the 2SLGBTQ+ community	○	○	○	○	○
05	The group leaders were effective	○	○	○	○	○
06	I would recommend this program to my 2SLGBTQ+ friends	○	○	○	○	○
07	This program has changed the way I think or feel about my body	○	○	○	○	○
08	I will practice or apply what I learned in the program	○	○	○	○	○
09	I will talk about the program with other people	○	○	○	○	○
10	This program will change the way I interact with friends, family, and other people in my life	○	○	○	○	○

Appendix

Identity Terminology

Please note

This list of terms is not exhaustive. Language related to this community changes over time and across culture. As a facilitator, it is good practice to do your own research about culturally appropriate terms to use in addition to referring to this section of the manual.

This particular list was created with the help of Canvas Programs. Please also reference their glossary:

www.canvasprograms.com/glossary

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2SLGBTQ+
An acronym which stand for "Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and more".

- These differing communities are linked by their shared experiences of homophobia and transphobia.
- The plus sign (+) recognizes the many other identities who may likewise be affected by heteronormativity and cisnormativity.
- There are many variations of this acronym which include other identities.
- Canvas prioritizes 2S (two-spirit) at the front of this acronym to honour the Indigenous land we live on, to acknowledge the long history of gender and sexual diversity on Turtle Island, and to recognize the ways in which colonialism forces homophobia and transphobia onto Indigenous communities where these discriminations did not originally exist.

ALLY
A person who doesn't share a particular identity, but advocates for the safety, rights, and liberation of that community.

- For example, a non-2SLGBTQ+ person who supports the acceptance of the 2SLGBTQ+ community might be considered an ally.
- Perhaps "being an ally" is the term that should be used. Allyship is not an identity that you can claim; rather, it is an ongoing, continuous process of learning and acting in solidarity with people who experience discrimination.
- Being an ally involves asking how you can provide support; listening and being open to having your views challenged; using your time, money, and connections to give power to others; and speaking up against your peers who are showing prejudice.

AGENDER
A non-binary gender identity; a person who does not identify with any gender, or who identifies as genderless.

ANDROGYNOUS
A word to describe a behavior, trait, or style of expression that either blends both masculine and feminine forms of gender expression, or is culturally read as gender-neutral.

AROMANTIC
A person who experiences little or no romantic attraction (e.g. crushes).

- Aromanticism is a spectrum. People can also identify as "grey-romantic" if their romantic attraction falls into the "grey-area" between "typical" romantic attraction and "total" aromanticism.
- Sometimes shortened to "aro".

ASEXUAL
A person who experiences little or no sexual attraction.

- Asexual people may still experience romantic attraction, and may have a romantic identity in addition to their sexual identity. For example, an asexual person who is romantically interested in two or more genders may identify as biromantic as opposed to bisexual.
- Asexuality is a spectrum. People can also identify as grey-asexual if their sexual attraction falls into the "grey-area" between "typical" sexual attraction and "total" asexuality.
- Sometimes shortened to "ace".

BIGENDER
A non-binary gender identity, a person who identifies with two or more areas of the gender spectrum.

BISEXUAL
A person who is attracted to two or more genders

- Different people define bisexuality different ways. Some explain it as being attracted to two or more genders on the spectrum.

BOY / MAN
A gender identity that relates to masculinity, though has a different exact meaning for everyone; can refer to cisgender or transgender people.

CISGENDER

A person whose gender identity aligns with their sex assigned at birth.

- For example, a person who was assigned male at birth and understands themselves to be a man is a cisgender man.
- This is sometimes shortened to "cis". Examples include cis woman and cis man.

DEMIBOY / DEMIGIRL

A non-binary gender identity.

- A demigirl sometimes identifies as a girl/woman, or identifies with aspects of femininity.
- A demiboy sometimes identifies as a boy/man, or with aspects of masculinity.

DEMISEXUAL

A person who only experiences sexual attraction once they have formed a strong emotional connection to someone.

- This term is most commonly found in the asexual and grey-asexual community.

DYADIC

A person whose chromosomal, hormonal, or anatomical sex characteristics fall within the conventional classifications of male or female.

FEMALE

A person who is assigned the sex "female" at birth.

- Doctors and parents might say a baby is "female" based on body parts, sex chromosomes, and/or hormones.
- In the general population, this is often used interchangeably with "woman", which is a gender identity.

FEMININE

A word to describe a behavior, trait, or style of expression that has cultural associations with "being a woman". These associations change over time, between cultures, or person to person.

- Societal gender roles often expect men to be "masculine" and women to be "feminine".
- In the 2SLGBTQ+ community, the words "femme" and "fem" are sometimes used to describe a feminine expression.

GAY

A term for people who are attracted to the same gender as themselves.

- Sometimes used as an umbrella term for the wider 2SLGBTQ+ community. Specific members may use this label in addition to or in place of other ones (e.g. someone referring to themselves as gay AND lesbian).

GENDERFLUID

A non-binary gender identity; a person whose gender is not fixed. It may change over time and/or between situations.

GENDER NON-CONFORMING

A person whose gender expression or gender identity falls outside of what is expected of someone with their gender or sex.

- A person who is gender non-conforming can be trans, but does not have to be. For example, a girl who identifies as a "tomboy" or dresses in masculine clothing might be considered gender non-conforming.

GENDERQUEER

A non-binary gender identity; related to the word queer.

GIRL / WOMAN

A gender identity that stereotypically relates to femininity, though has a different exact meaning for everyone. Can refer to cisgender or transgender people.

INTERSEX

A person whose anatomy or biology at birth does not fit into the traditional categories of "male" and "female".

- A person can be intersex when their combination of reproductive organs, hormones, and/or chromosomes vary from the medical understandings of "male" and "female". For example, someone with XY chromosomes (associated with maleness) and a uterus (associated with femaleness) could be considered intersex.
- People who are labelled intersex when they are born (usually due to ambiguous genitalia) often receive non-consensual surgery or hormones as they grow up, in order to make them fit the "male" or "female" category. These invasive medical procedures can have damaging effects on body functions as well as mental health.
- Some people discover they are intersex at puberty (where they may experience changes they didn't expect), or when they attempt to conceive children.

LESBIAN

A woman or non-binary person who is attracted to women, or who identifies with the lesbian community.

MALE

A person who is assigned the sex "male" at birth.

- Doctors and parents assign the sex "male" based on body parts, sex chromosomes, and/or hormones.
- In the general population, this is often used interchangeably with "man", which is a gender identity.

MASCULINE

A word to describe a behavior, trait, or style of expression that has cultural associations with "being a man". These associations change over time, between cultures, or person to person.

- Societal gender roles often expect men to be "masculine" and women to be "feminine."
- What is considered "feminine" and "masculine" varies historically and from culture to culture.
- In the 2SLGBTQ+ community, the word "masc" is sometimes used to describe a masculine expression.

NON-BINARY

A gender identity describing a person who identifies outside the gender binary of "man" and "woman".

- A non-binary person might identify as being both, neither, changing between the two, or something else beyond a "man" or "woman."
- Some non-binary people consider themselves part of the transgender community.

PANSEXUAL:

A person who is attracted to all genders, or a person whose attraction is not limited by gender.

- A pansexual person is not necessarily attracted to every human being, but may find that gender does not play a role in who they are attracted to.
- People define this term differently, according to what it means to them.

QUEER

An unbrella term for people who are not straight and/or not cisgender.

- The 2SLGBTQ+ community is sometimes referred to as "the queer community."
- This was historically a hurtful word, but was reclaimed by some 2SLGBTQ+ people to describe themselves. It is not appropriate to use this term to describe someone within the community if you do not know whether or not they have reclaimed it for themselves.

QUESTIONING

When a person is uncertain about their sexual or romantic orientation and/or gender identity.

- A person can be questioning at any age, and may do so multiple times throughout their life.

STRAIGHT

A person who is attracted to a different gender from their own.

- For example, a man who is attracted to women could be described as straight.

TRANSGENDER

A term for a person whose gender identity does not "align" with the sex they were assigned at birth in the way that society expects.

- For example, a person who was assigned male at birth, but understands themselves to be a woman might call themselves a transgender woman.
- A person who was assigned male at birth, but understands themselves to be non-binary might also consider themselves transgender.
- This is sometimes shortened to "trans."
- People can identify as transgender regardless of if they can or want to medically transition.

TRANSSEXUAL

An older term for a person who is transgender, though this term is less preffered nowadays.

- This term usually indicated that a person had transitioned medically. Because not all trans people can or want to medically transition, the term "transgender" or "trans" is more popular.

TWO-SPIRIT

A term that references historical gender traditions in many Indigenous North American cultures (e.g. First Nations, Inuit, and Métis)

- Two-spirit might refer to an Indigenous person who settlers would consider queer or trans.
- Throughout history, many Indigenous nations did not have a gender binary and recognized gender identities on a spectrum and beyond "man" and "woman". These exact identities varied from nation to nation.
- Two-Spirit refers to gender and sexual identity AND spiritual and community responsibilities. In many historical traditions, two-spirit people have important community roles, like healers and teachers.
- Because of ongoing colonization, many Indigenous peoples no longer know the words in their ancestral languages to describe this diverse spectrum of genders and sexualities. "Two-spirit" was coined as a temporary alternative while ancestral words are being remembered and reclaimed.
- Today, many indigenous people use the word "Two-Spirit" to refer to their identity and role in the community. They may also identify as LGBTQ+, but by calling themselves "Two Spirit" they also refer to their spiritual role in their community.

- A comprehensive definition from https://lgbtqhealth.ca/community/two-spirit.php: "Two-spirit refers to a person who identifies as having both a masculine and a feminine spirit, and is used by some Indigenous people to describe their sexual, gender and/or spiritual identity. As an umbrella term it may encompass same-sex attraction and a wide variety of gender variance, including people who might be described in Western culture as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, gender queer, cross-dressers or who have multiple gender identities. Two-spirit can also include relationships that could be considered poly. The creation of the term "two-spirit" is attributed to Albert McLeod, who proposed its use during the Third Annual Inter-tribal Native American, First Nations, Gay and Lesbian American Conference, held in Winnipeg in 1990. The term is a translation of the Anishinaabemowin term niizh manidoowag, two spirits."

Other 2SLGBTQ+ terms

THE GENDER BINARY / THE SEX BINARY

The system of thought which believes that there are only two genders (man and woman) or that there are only two sexes (male and female).

- The gender binary excludes people who are non-binary or trans.
- The sex binary excludes people who are intersex.

BIPHOBIA

Negative stereotypes and attitudes targeted at bisexual people.

- Importantly, "biphobia" describes the unique prejudices faced by bisexual people that differ from homophobia. (e.g. People assuming that a bisexual woman dating a man is actually just straight.)

CISNORMATIVITY

A cultural system in which being cisgender is considered the normal or default way of being.

- An example of cisnormativity might be when there are only "men's" and "women's" washrooms in a building. This assumes that everyone identifies as either a man or a woman.

COMING OUT

The process by which someone reveals their 2SLGBTQ+ identity.

- Coming out is rarely a one-time event; it is often a continuous decision throughout life with each new friend, family member, or coworker.
- A person may be "out" to everyone, to some people and not others, or "out" to only themselves. There are many reasons why someone may not come out, and this does not mean they are less 2SLGBTQ+.

DRAG

The act of dressing up in a different gender expression, often for fun or as performance art. "Drag queens" often refers to people for whom drag means becoming more feminine, while "drag kings" often refers to those for whom drag means becoming more masculine.

- Drag performance, events, and competitions have a rich history that goes back decades.
- People who do drag are not necessarily trans.

GENDERED

Indicates that something is associated with a particular gender or sex.

- Toys, colours, and clothing are often gendered or seen as being either "for boys" or "for girls".
- Language can be gendered as well. Terms like "ladies and gentlemen" address certain genders specifically.

GENDER-NEUTRAL

Indicates that something is not associated with any particular gender or sex.

- For example, gender-neutral bathrooms are bathrooms that anyone can use, regardless of their gender.

GENDER DYSPHORIA

Negative feelings associated with being perceived as a gender that is not true to you, or having a body that does not feel true to your gender.

- Many trans people experience dysphoria, though not all do.
- Dysphoria can lead to distress and mental health complications.
- Dysphoria may be a reason some trans people choose to medically transition.

GENDER EUPHORIA

Positive feelings associated with being perceived as your actual gender identity or having a body that feels true to your identity.

HETERONORMATIVITY

A cultural system in which being straight is considered the normal or default way of being.

- For example, asking a woman "do you have a boyfriend" assumes that she is straight, while asking "are you dating anyone" does not.
- A common form of heteronormativity is making assumptions about babies and young children regarding who they will be attracted to when they grow up.

HOMOPHOBIA

Negative stereotypes and attitudes targeted at gay and lesbian people, or more broadly at 2SLGBTQ+ people.

MISGENDERING

Using the wrong pronouns or gendered language to describe someone.

- Many trans people experience misgendering on a daily basis. For example, calling a trans woman "he", when she uses the pronoun "she".
- This can cause dysphoria and have damaging effects on mental health.
- Misgendering can be intentional or accidental. If you accidentally misgender someone, correcting yourself going forward is one way to be an ally.

OUTING

Revealing someone else's 2SLGBTQ+ identity without their consent or their permission.

- Outing can be uncomfortable or dangerous to the person being "outed". It can risk someone's physical, emotional, and/or mental safety.

PRONOUNS

Small words used to refer to people without using their name (e.g. sher/her/hers)

- Some people use gender-neutral pronouns such as "they/them" or "ze/hir".
- Many non-English languages don't use gendered pronouns at all. In some languages that traditionally use only "he" and "she", people are making new gender neutral pronouns.

QUEER-FRIENDLY

Indicated that a place or person is supportive of the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

- Being "queer-friendly" is related to being an ally.

REPRESENTATION

The inclusion of an identity or culture in media and other aspects of society.

- Some examples of representation are the inclusion of 2SLGBTQ+ characters on TV, the presence of 2SLGBTQ+ leaders in government, or the presence of 2SLGBTQ+ role models in a community.
- Without representation, 2SLGBTQ+ people can feel different and alone, or may not believe there are other people like them.
- Good representation can challenge stereotypes and change societal perspectives.
- Poor representation can reinforce stereotypes. For example, if the only representation of 2SLGBTQ+ people is of white people, then we may wrongly assume that 2SLGBTQ+ people are usually white.

TRANSITION

The process by which a trans person changes the way they present themselves to more accurately reflect their gender and live their truth.

- Socially transitioning can involve changing one's name, pronouns, or gender expression (for example, dressing or acting differently).
- Medical transition can involve hormone therapy (such as taking testosterone or estrogen), or having gender-confirming surgery to change body parts.
- Transition can mean different things for everyone. Not every trans person feels the need to transition.

TRANSPHOBIA

Negative stereotypes and attitudes targeted at trans people.

Consent terms

CONSENT

The right to say "yes" or "no" to an interaction or activity; and agreement or permission for something.

- Not exclusive to romantic and sexual activity, and can relate to many different situations.
- Consent must be mutual (everyone involved has to agree), continuous (you can stop at any time), and specific (every part of the activity is agreed upon).
- In sexual scenarios, everyone is responsible for ensuring that an activity is consensual, but especially the person who is initiating the activity.
- An activity is NOT consensual if a person is forced, coerced, manipulated, or pressured into agreeing or going along with it.

CONSENT CULTURE

An environment where consent is respected and valued and where everyone feels comfortable expressing their needs and personal boundaries.

RAPE CULTURE

A society where sexual violence is common and is seen as normal, inevitable, and even sexy.

- In a rape culture, some people (usually women) are seen as objects rather than full people with needs/desires/independence.
- In a rape culture, survivors of sexual violence are blamed for the violence they received.
- Examples of rape culture can be seen in TV and movies, in songs and music videos, in court proceedings, and in conversation and news regarding sexual assaults.

SEXUAL ASSAULT

Any unwanted act of a sexual nature.

- Some people use "sexual assault" and "rape" interchangeably, however survivors of sexual assault should be able to define their own experiences.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Unwanted acts of a sexual nature that often involve coercion, societally considered "milder" compared to sexual assault.

- Examples of sexual harassment include pressuring someone to agree to sexual activity online, touching someone's bottom, putting hands suggestively on someone's shoulders, and cat-calling (whistling or making sexual remarks at strangers).
- Without intervention or prevention, sexual harassment can elevate to sexual assault.

SURVIVOR

Someone who has been sexually assaulted.

Canvas uses the term "survivor" as opposed to "victim" because:

- People who are sexually assaulted are often at risk of additional violence and death before, during, and after the assault.
- Sexual assault can have incredibly damaging effects on a survivor's mental health.
- Survivors have the ability to process their assault and trauma.
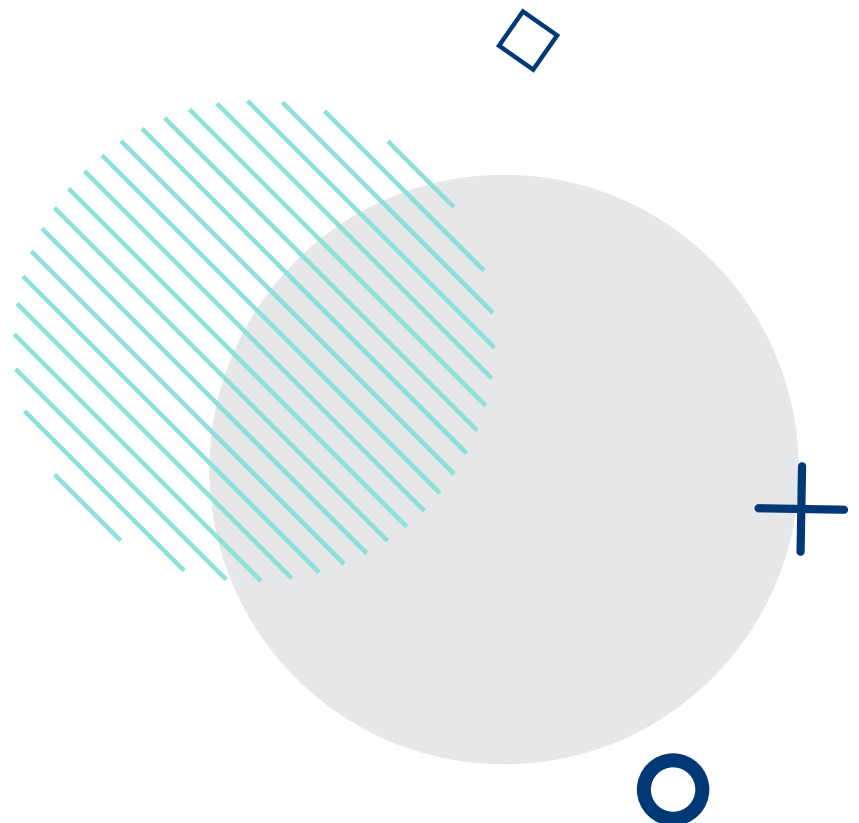
FAQ and Frequently Made Comments

How do I facilitate the discussion around gender dysphoria and body change vs. acceptance?

- Leaders should acknowledge this tension (change vs. acceptance) and how social norms around gender expression influence these pressures.
- Leaders should speak to the fact that the way we choose to express ourselves in the world is a personal decision and there are many options for how people choose to do this (i.e., if someone is considering/has questions about body change, highlight that there are many options including choosing clothing that makes you feel good/comfortable, wearing clothing items like binders, etc. Other people may take hormones and others may choose to get some form of surgery.)
- All of these are personal choices and ones that you may take a few years to think through and decide what is best for you.

What do I do if someone is openly invested in appearance ideals?

- It might be helpful to ask questions that encourage self reflection (e.g., "That's an idea many of us believe. Where do you think that idea comes from? Where do we learn these things?")
- It also can be useful to turn this to the bigger group and validate it (e.g., "Does anyone else sometimes think that? It's really hard to shut off those messages, isn't it?")
- If it persists, it might be necessary to directly address it without dismissing the participant (e.g., "I know it's hard to push back against these ideas when they seem to go against everything we've learned and are told — for today and the rest of the session, why don't we practice pushing back, even if we don't fully believe it yet?")

What do I do if someone makes a transphobic or homophobic comment?

- These comments should be addressed directly and immediately.
- First, open with "Do you mind explaining what you mean by that?" Sometimes people say harmful things without realizing it/meaning to. Giving them an opportunity to explain often helps to diffuse the comment.

- If they continue to say something harmful, here are a few options (depending on the type of comment and if it seems intentionally rude or is just due to ignorance):
  1. "I'm glad you brought that idea up. I think this is a really common idea that many of us are taught growing up. However, it can actually be harmful. Can anyone think how [the comment] might impact someone who is part of the 2SLGBTQ+ community?".
  2. Refer back to the space agreement created at the beginning of the session, i.e. I'm going to remind you that we all agreed to be respectful of other identities and perspectives.
  3. If a participant is consistently saying harmful things, a facilitator should speak with them 1:1. Remember that sometimes people who are disruptive may be reacting because the discussion is getting too close to home for them, so it's good to have an opportunity to check in privately about what's going on.

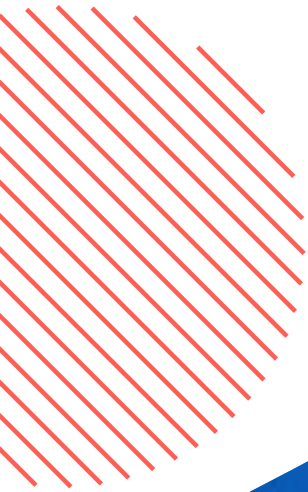## What do I do if my group is really quiet?

- First, know that some groups (and leaders!) are just more quiet than others! If participants seem hesitant to speak up, you can "go around the circle" to give them a chance to say something, while reinforcing their comments (e.g., "great point!" "thanks for sharing" etc.)
- Look for body language cues that someone has something they are thinking about sharing and invite them to contribute (e.g., "Sal, was there something you wanted to share with the group?")
- Make sure that you as a leader are setting the tone for sharing and being vulnerable (e.g., not saying the perfect thing) — this might help draw people out.

What do I do if I am running out of time?

- Call attention to it and gently move the group on (e.g., "Wow it seems like we could talk about this all day! But we have a lot more to get to, so let's move on.")
- Leaders should stick to the time but also be flexible — you want to cultivate a space where participants can share and be vulnerable, so sometimes slowing down will be necessary to validate and allow for the sharing that is happening. Use your best judgement about when to linger and when to move forward.

If one person or a few people are talking significantly more than others

- It can be helpful to call in folks who aren't sharing as much (e.g., "for this one, let's hear from someone who hasn't contributed yet") — this also sends a message to those who are participating more to step back and create space for others.
- You may want to call on people directly if it looks like people want to contribute but there hasn't been space for them.
- "Going around the room" is a good way to have equal contribution when you pose a specific question — feel free to adapt any of the prompts to ask folks to each take a turn sharing their response. You may also want to start with the participants who are more quiet to allow space for them to speak first.
- It may be necessary to call attention to the person sharing a lot — people can get excited to share and you'll want to encourage this while also making room for everyone. You could try saying something like "Wow Lucy, you have so much wisdom to share — I love it! I do want to make sure we hear from everyone though — what do other people think?")

Appendix A: What do I do if someone in my group is really struggling?

- Group members will come to these lessons with different lived experiences that may make them more or less vulnerable to discussing these topics. If **someone in your group seems quiet and withdrawn**, or is visibly upset by the conversation or activities, you should check in with them before the group concludes.

- If your **group has more than one leader, the leader** who is not leading that section may want to ask the group member to step outside of the room with you to discuss what is going on and/or offer them a break from the conversation. If you have only one leader, you should ask the group member to stay behind after the lesson ends to do your check in.

- If a **group member shares significant struggles with the group**, you may want to address this directly with the entire group by validating the experience and offering the option to anyone who needs it to take a short break from the conversation. You may also want to stop the group for a brief period to do a grounding exercise, engage in deep breathing, give a movement break, or use another strategy to provide care for difficult emotions. In this scenario, it may also be helpful to ask the group member to stay behind after the lesson finishes to check in one-on-one as well.

- **Leaders should have a list of referrals** on hand to provide to group members who may need them or to share with the entire group – we may recommend the latter to help normalize help seeking. These should include referrals for mental health care, ideally including services for eating disorders and self-harm behaviors, and 2SLGBTQ+ affirming care.

Appendix B: Grounding Exercises, 5 Senses

If one or more group members are struggling, you may choose to pause and use the following grounding exercise with the individual or with the group.

We're going to take a moment to pause and engage with all five of our senses, to remind ourselves where we are right now. You can move around if you need to.

Can you start by naming 5 things that you **see right now?**

What are 4 things that you can **touch around you?**

Name 3 things that you can **hear in this moment.**

Tell me 2 things that you can **smell in this room.**

Finally, what's 1 thing that **you can taste?**

Let's finish by taking three deep breaths all together, if you're open to it. You can follow my breathing if that works for you.