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# **What is Body Image?**

Step 1 of improving your body image is to understand what body image is. Now although this is really important, I don't need to spend pages and pages explaining it. Let's keep it simple. Your body image is...

**how you think and feel about your body  
or your appearance or your looks.**

Here are some examples of thoughts and feelings that other young people have about their bodies.

'I'm so spotty it's horrible! I'm so ashamed.' (Fran, 14)

'I'm not perfect, but hey, who is? I'm just me and that's OK!' (Sally, 12)

'I'll never get a girlfriend unless I lose weight!' (Karl, 16)

'I hate my body. All of it!' (George, 11)

'I can't wait until I'm old enough to make my own decisions about my hair. The moment I am, I'm getting rid of the ginger ugliness that sits on my head. I'm dyeing it blonde. After all, every guy loves a blonde!' (Vicky, 13)

'I don't care what anyone else says or thinks about how I look! I'm happy with myself. That's what counts.' (Clive, 14)

'I can't help being thin, but all the adults think I'm anorexic, all the girls at school hate me and the boys laugh at me for being flat chested. I hate how I look!' (Lily, 16)

'So I'm never going to be blonde, tall, skinny and leggy and get drooled over like Melanie in my year at school. But I know it's who you are as a person that's important!' (Kristen, 12)

'I'm so ugly. No-one else would ever want to look like me! I'm worthless.' (Roisin, 10)

'I'm so worried that no-one will ever find me attractive as I don't have a six-pack!' (Marlon, 15)

'I'm such a wimp! I have arms like matchsticks.' (Ollie, 15)

These thoughts and feelings can also impact on how people behave and on their lives in general. Here are the same young people describing how they act in response to their thoughts and feelings about their bodies.

'I spend hours picking at my skin in front of a mirror. But then I make my spots worse and feel even more ashamed.' (Fran, 14)

'I enjoy going shopping for new clothes.' (Sally, 12)

'I am constantly trying to diet and I spend hours looking in the mirror and pinching at my skin to see if I have lost any weight.' (Karl, 16)

'I avoid looking in the mirror and I wear big, baggy clothes that hide my body.' (George, 11)

'I can't leave the house unless I have one of my bandanas or hats on my head. School wouldn't let me wear them in class so I started skipping school. My mum home schools me now.' (Vicky, 13)

'I eat healthily and exercise regularly because I know it's important to be healthy, not because I have to look a certain way.' (Clive, 14)

'I started self-harming two years ago to try and cope with the comments people make about me.' (Lily, 16)

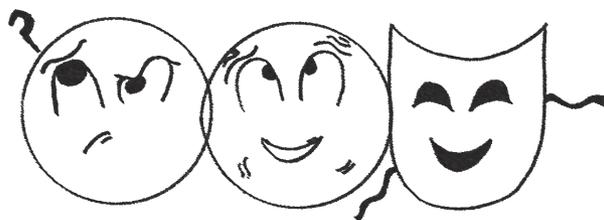
'I just ignore the comments other girls at school make about my height and my glasses!' (Kristen, 12)

'I try on so many different outfits before I go out to play with my friends after school and I constantly ask my mum if I look OK.' (Roisin, 10)

'I bully other people about how they look so I don't get bullied back.' (Marlon, 15)

'I spend hours every evening on my gym equipment at home and have started stealing my older brother's protein shakes.' (Ollie, 15)

Some of the young people above have a positive body image and some of them have a negative body image. You will learn more about the links between our thoughts, feelings and behaviours and how these links help to determine whether we have a positive or a negative body image as you progress through this workbook, as understanding this is key to improving your body image.



think

feel

act

But first you need to assess exactly how you think and feel about your body at this point in time and what impacts these thoughts and feelings are having on your behaviours and on your life in general. This is Step 2 in improving your body image. There is a questionnaire in the next chapter to help you to do this.