Appearance Ideals

Workshop Guide for Teachers
Learning outcomes and resources

IN THIS WORKSHOP, STUDENTS WILL:

- Understand the concept of appearance ideals and where pressure to achieve them comes from.
- Recognize what specifically pressures them to match appearance ideals, as well as the impact this has on their everyday lives.
- Develop strategies to challenge ideals of appearance, resist pressure linked to appearance, and build body confidence.

RESOURCES YOU WILL NEED:

- Workshop materials
  - Workshop guide
  - Workshop presentation
  - Two activity sheets (one set per student)
  - "Going further" sheet (one per student)

- From your school
  - Projector and whiteboard
  - Each student will need a pen
  - OPTIONAL:
    - Spare paper
    - Flip chart and markers

Resources:

- Workshop guide
- Workshop presentation
- Two activity sheets
- "Going further" sheet
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Overview

INTRODUCING APPEARANCE IDEALS

• What are we learning today?
• What do we mean by appearance ideals?
• What are today’s ideals of appearance?
• How are appearance ideals constantly changing?
• Can we match ideals of appearance?
• Where do we find out about appearance ideals?

APPEARANCE-RELATED PRESSURES

• What appearance-related pressures do we face?
• What is the impact of these appearance pressures?
• What else can we value?

BE A CHAMPION FOR CHANGE

• What have we learned today?
• How will you be a champion for change?
• Congratulations!
• Going further
Workshop 1 of 5
Appearance Ideals

How to use this guide

Learning outcome. Students should achieve this by the end of the section.

Visual cues and learning objectives. To help you steer the workshop and deliver it effectively.

Teacher actions. Non-italicized bullet points highlight important questions to ask students so that key workshop concepts are addressed with the best impact on body confidence. Text in italics indicates instructions to help structure workshop activities, e.g. when you should present videos or use activity sheets. You may adapt these to suit the specific needs of your class.

Student actions. Non-italicized bullet points highlight important questions to ask students so that key workshop concepts are addressed with the best impact on body confidence. Text in italics indicates instructions to help structure workshop activities, e.g. when you should present videos or use activity sheets. You may adapt these to suit the specific needs of your class.

 Desired responses from students. To help you guide students’ answers in a way that develops their understanding throughout the workshop and has the most impact on their body confidence.

Suggested time allocation. Reflects the relative importance of each section for achieving learning outcomes and improving students’ body confidence, but may be adapted to suit the length of your lesson.

Notes. Ideas and guidance for making the workshop as effective as possible for students.

Key activities. The key activities are those that are most effective for improving body confidence. These are shown in blue and should be prioritized if you are low on time.

Workshop 1 of 5
Appearance Ideals

Appearance-related pressures

By the end of this section, students will recognize the pressures caused by trying to match appearance ideals, and the impact this has on their everyday lives.

Teacher actions. Take a few responses, but don’t take too much time. The main goal is for students to realize it takes a lot (as opposed to specific quantities). You may need to make it clear that it’s OK to take care of your appearance!

What students are exploring here is when they might get too caught up in trying to achieve a look that is impossible for most, using up too much time, money, or emotions in the process. Note that “feelings” in this context refers to emotional energy, effort, and stress.

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Introducing appearance ideals

By the end of this section, students will understand the concept of appearance ideals and where pressure to achieve them comes from.

Students are welcomed to the workshop.

Introduce the workshop.

Explain that today is the first in a series of five workshops that will help students think about the appearance-related pressures young people run into. The workshops will help them explore more helpful ways to manage these pressures and build body confidence.

What are our workshop ground rules?

- Respect diversity
- Ask questions
- Keep it confidential
- Please contribute

Share the ground rules.

Sharing rules with your class is a useful mechanism for establishing a different feel from normal lessons in these workshops.

It is worth taking time to ensure these rules feel collaborative and, if necessary, adjusting them to suit the needs of your class.
Students understand that the workshop will focus on understanding ideals of appearance and how they can challenge the pressure these ideals create.

What are learning today?
- Introducing appearance ideals
- Sources of appearance ideals
- Appearance-related pressures
- Challenging appearance pressures

What do we mean by appearance ideals?
What our culture tells us is the ideal way to look at any given time.

Make sure that all students understand what is meant by appearance ideals so they can effectively learn the rest of the workshop material.
Workshop 1 of 5
Appearance Ideals

**PRESENTATION**

> What are today's ideals of appearance?

Students explore the concept of appearance ideals, giving examples of what society currently tells us is the ideal look for boys and girls.

**TEACHER ACTIONS**

> Arrange students into small single-sex groups.

**DESIRED RESPONSES**

> Explain that before the students start challenging appearance pressures, they need to establish what society currently tells us is the ideal appearance for boys and girls.

- Can you give me one or two examples of what society tells us are the appearance ideals for boys? How about for girls?

> Instruct students to complete Activity sheet 1, Task 1.1 (for girls or for boys).

- Create as long a list as possible of the physical features that make up today's appearance ideals.

> Invite different groups to share their ideas with the class, putting all their ideas on a whiteboard.

**PRESENTATION**

- Examples of appearance ideals include:
  - Girls – long, slim legs; slim/skinny; clear, flawless skin; toned; big eyes; flat stomach; straight white teeth.
  - Boys – muscular; tall; slim waist; lean, v-shaped torso; low body fat; broad chest; flat stomach; six pack; straight, white teeth.

**TEACHER ACTIONS**

> Highlight the inherent contradictions in the list of features, such as small feet and long legs, or no body fat and large breasts. This will help students recognize the futility of trying to match ideals of appearance.

**DESIRED RESPONSES**

> Ask girls to suggest appearance ideals for girls, and boys to suggest appearance ideals for boys.

Research has shown that students feel most comfortable completing this activity in single-sex groups and when working with friends.

Encourage students to be specific in their answers.

While it may help students to complete their own sheet so they have a record of this activity, they might feel more comfortable pooling their ideas on one group sheet.

You may need to acknowledge that although different groups of students might uphold different ideals of attractiveness, they all are narrow ideas that push us to work towards an unrealistic goal.
Workshop 1 of 5
Appearance Ideals

Students watch an animation that shows different appearance ideals for men and women across time.

Explain that the features we have just listed are what we feel are society’s current appearance ideals, but these ideals are constantly changing.

Play the animation.

- What do you think all these images show?
- Lead your students in a quick game of "spot the difference".
- Looking at all of the images, what differences do you notice between them?
- How are they different from today’s appearance ideals that you identified earlier?
- Reinforce that all these images represent ideals of attractiveness: (what was considered beautiful, glamorous, and attractive) at different times in the past.
- If all these images represent appearance ideals, why do you think they don’t all look the same?
- Facilitate a short class discussion.
- What do you think future appearance ideals might be—is it a look you would want?

Contrasts between different images, e.g. thin waists versus curvy body, formal clothes versus casual shirts and tattoos.

Appearance ideals are really different and are always changing across time, countries, and cultures. They never stay the same!

They show us people at different times throughout history.
Students understand that appearance ideals represent narrow, changing ideas about how people should look that are based on opinions, not facts. Trying to resemble these ideals is actually impossible for most people, so trying to match them is unrealistic, pointless, and possibly harmful.

It is almost impossible for someone to match ideals of appearance because the ideals are always changing, and it is a really narrow ideal that often contains contradictions (such as small feet, long legs).

Because our looks are mainly defined by our genes, it is not possible for us all to look the same—and why should we want to?

> Given what we’ve already discussed about appearance ideals:
  - How realistic is it for someone to match them?
  - Thinking about how naturally different we all are, how easy is it for all of us to conform to ideals of attractiveness?

It is almost impossible for someone to match ideals of appearance because the ideals are always changing, and it is a really narrow ideal that often contains contradictions (such as small feet, long legs).

Because our looks are mainly defined by our genes, it is not possible for us all to look the same—and why should we want to?

> Now that the class has identified that it isn’t realistic for people to meet standards of attractiveness, explain that students will be considering where they come from so we can challenge them.

> Class-wide discussion, calling for volunteers to answer.

- Where do you think these pressures to look beautiful or attractive come from?
- Why do you think it is important to know where these ideals come from?

Answers could include: advertisements, magazines, fashion industry, websites, celebrity culture, diet industry, parents or family, friends, other young people, bullies, social media, our own thoughts.

By knowing where these ideals come from, we can begin to change how we react to these ideals when we see them.

Appearance-related pressures:

The pressures we feel to match an appearance ideal and to be beautiful, glamorous, and attractive.

Be careful not to create a blaming atmosphere. Messages about appearance ideals are such a common part of our social environment that we may not even be aware of them.
Appearance Ideals

Appearance-related pressures

By the end of this section, students will recognize the pressures caused by trying to meet ideals of appearance and the impact this has on their everyday lives.

Students will give examples of the time, money, and emotional energy it can take trying to conform to ideals of attractiveness.

**TEACHER ACTIONS**

> Now that students understand what appearance ideals are—and where pressures come from—explain that they’ll be exploring the pressures these ideals can put on our daily lives.

> Ask the students to “think, pair, and share” for the questions below. Pose the question, allow the students to first think by themselves for a moment, then have them quickly discuss the question with their partner before reporting back to the entire class.

• **How much time** would it take to try and match appearance ideals?

• **How much money** would it cost?

• **How would constantly trying to achieve appearance ideals make you feel?**

> Take one or two responses.

**PRESENTATION**

What appearance-related pressures do we face?

**DESIR ED RESPONSES**

Ideas could include being late for school because you are taking too much time on your hair, running out of money because you’ve spent it all on beauty products, or not feeling good enough because you can’t match changing and narrowly-defined ideals of attractiveness.

Take a few responses, but don’t take too much time. The main goal is for students to realize it takes a lot (as opposed to specific quantities).

You may need to make it clear that it’s OK to take care of your appearance! What students are exploring here is when they might get too caught up in trying to achieve a look that is impossible for most, using up too much time, money, or emotions in the process.
Workshop 1 of 5
Appearance Ideals

Students generate a full list of pressures associated with trying to match appearance ideals in terms of time, money, and emotional energy.

Examples of negative consequences include:

**Time** – on hair, makeup, skin care, extreme exercise, dieting, checking or comparing your appearance with others, dwelling on negative emotions.

**Money** – spent on hair products/treatments, skin care, makeup, clothes, magazines, beauty treatments, gym membership, dieting products, or surgery.

**Emotions and feelings** – frustration, anger, sadness, jealousy, anxiety, shame, embarrassment, dread, dissatisfaction, unhappiness.

Giving students a fixed, short time for this activity can also help increase focus.

Make sure the students don’t take this as an opportunity to share tips.

If students are struggling, refer them to the list of appearance ideals they previously generated. It can also help to ask students to imagine someone of a similar age, background, and interests to themselves.

Students may provide examples of people who have had cosmetic surgery. Take care not to criticize anyone the students might personally know, but help students see that surgery is a serious step and can’t guarantee that a person will always feel confident with their looks. Students might use this task to argue that some people can conform to appearance ideals with little time, money, or emotional energy. Remind students that these people might still not feel satisfied with their appearance and will not always feel that they look their best—and just because people might easily meet ideals of attractiveness, it doesn’t guarantee that their lifestyle is any more ideal.

> Explain that students are going to have a competition to explore the pressures that trying to match appearance ideals can cause in more detail. Divide the class in half; within each half, arrange students into small groups focusing on time, money, or emotions/feelings.

> Instruct students to complete Activity sheet 1, Task 1.2.

> What can it cost you to try meeting standards of attractiveness?

> Invite both halves of the classroom to take turns sharing their ideas for time, money, and emotions/feelings. Which group generated the most ideas?

> Make a list of students’ ideas.
Workshop 1 of 5
Appearance Ideals

Students understand that people put pressure on themselves to meet appearance ideals because they feel it might help them achieve an ideal lifestyle. However, achieving what society considers an ideal appearance does not automatically make your life ideal, nor does meeting the ideals mean you won’t be happy.

Now that students have considered the pressure that trying to meet appearance ideals can cause, explain that they’ll be examining the reasons people might still put this pressure on themselves.

Facilitate a short class discussion.

- What do you think people feel they will achieve by meeting appearance ideals?
- What else do they think might happen or change in their life?
- Is it true that if someone meets appearance ideals, they are automatically happy, confident, or successful?

Initiate a class vote.

- Raise your hand if you feel the opposite is true: that is, are people who don’t conform to appearance ideals automatically or always unhappy, lacking in confidence, or unsuccessful?
- How could you spend your time, money, and energy in a better way?

It is worth trying to challenge or resist these pressures because it is not realistic to meet appearance ideals, and we sacrifice time, money, and energy trying to achieve something that is not possible. It would be better to put these resources into more worthwhile activities that we enjoy.

Voting in this way allows students to demonstrate their personal commitment to engage with the workshop and build their body confidence.
Workshop 1 of 5
Appearance Ideals

PRESENTATION

What else can we value?

Students will generate other positive qualities and activities that shape their self-worth and help them to celebrate their individuality.

TEACHER ACTIONS

> Now that students have recognized that trying to attain appearance ideals can cause lots of problems and be harmful for our self-esteem, explain that they are going to consider ways they can feel better about themselves.

> Ask several students for ideas.

• What do you enjoy doing?

> Instruct students to complete Activity sheet 2 independently.

• Think about the qualities and interests that make you unique.

> Invite one or two people willing to share their ideas.

DESIRED RESPONSES

If students still select appearance-based qualities, highlight that they are of minimal importance compared to all of the other qualities identified—that there are aspects about them that matter more than appearance.

If students choose to reduce the time, money, or effort they spend trying to meet ideals of appearance, they will have more time, money, and energy for other activities that can help them develop their confidence and potential further.
Be a champion for change

By the end of this section, students will have reflected on their learning throughout the workshop, committing to one action to champion body confidence.

Throughout the workshop, students will have:

- Understood the concept of appearance ideals and where pressure to achieve them comes from.
- Recognized the pressures caused by trying to match appearance ideals and the impact this has on their everyday lives.
- Developed strategies to challenge ideals of attractiveness, resist appearance-related pressures, and build body confidence.

Students will share the key messages from today's workshop.

> Ask for volunteers to briefly recall what they learned in the workshop.

> What have we learned in today's workshop?

> Invite volunteers to read out the key learning points from the slide, and then summarize any points students might have missed.

Students articulate the key messages in their own words.
Workshop 1 of 5
Appearance Ideals

Students will use what they have learned today to make a commitment to personally challenge appearance ideals.

**PRESENTATION**

**TEACHER ACTIONS**

- What will you do to personally challenge appearance ideals from now on?
  - Invite one or two students to share their ideas with the class.

**DESIRED RESPONSES**

- For example, students could write a short statement celebrating their own personal qualities, or practice staying alert when they or their friends compare their appearance to others.

Help students choose a small and specific action, making it easier for them to stick to their pledge.

If possible, offer to stay behind or speak to students at another time about anything you have covered in the workshop.

Remind students that the workshops they are undertaking are all about learning to challenge or resist the pressures we face to conform to appearance ideals, and how we can focus on other qualities that help us all make the most of life.

**PRESENTATION**

**Going further**

> Encourage your students to explore the ideas raised in today’s workshops by completing the “Going further” sheet before the next workshop.

> To prepare for the next workshop, find three examples of how the media promotes ideals of appearance.
Workshop 1 of 5
Appearance Ideals

Next steps

You have now completed Workshop 1: Appearance Ideals from Confident Me: School Workshops for Body Confidence. The next workshop in the series is: Media Messages.

ABOUT THIS WORKSHOP:
In this workshop, students learn how to become more savvy, critical consumers of media. Students explore how images of people in the media, such as in advertising, entertainment, and social media, are often manipulated and drastically altered to reflect current appearance ideals. They identify how professional media also manipulates reality to promote an ideal appearance or lifestyle in order to encourage people to buy a product or service. Students recognize that they can challenge these media messages by changing the media they consume and create (like words, pictures, and video). They commit to being true to themselves and their friends and to publish what’s real.

Access the materials for this workshop and others in the Confident Me: Five-Session Program at: selfesteem.dove.us

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