

Y10 RSHE Theme: Healthy Lifestyles

Learning Ladder to be inserted here

Learning objectives:

- Identify ways in which the media presents idealised and artificial body shapes
- Explain how the media can impact body image
- Explain how body image can impact mental health
- Identify strategies for managing negative influences on self-esteem and building a resilient body image

Last lesson: Managing our health + services and support

Title for this lesson: An introduction to body image

Starter activity: Where do we see harmful messages about body image in the media?

Reading:

The Harvest by
TWM Ashford



The 6 Rs:

- Resilience
- Responsibility



Career/Future You:

- Promoting longer life expectancy and modelling healthy lifestyle for others incl. family and peers.

Safeguarding:

Making you aware of the choices available for living a longer and healthier life.

Keywords: Body image, media, diversity, mental health, social media



RSHE Ground Rules

- Everyone has the right to be heard and **respected**.
- We will use **language** that won't offend or upset other people.
- We will use the correct **terms**, and if we don't know them, we'll ask the teacher.
- We will **reflect** on what was said, not the person who said it.
- We won't share our own, or our friends', personal experiences.
- We won't put anyone on the spot and we have a right to pass.
- We won't judge or make assumptions about anyone.

Teacher's slide – guidance on body image

This lesson covers the topics of body image and mental health. This slide gives a brief guide for teachers for handling these topics sensitively.

According to NHS data, in 2021, 17.4% of 6- to 16-year-olds had a probable mental health disorder and 13% of 11- to 16-year-olds had possible eating problems. In a UK survey conducted in 2020, 66% of children reported feeling negative or very negative about their body image most of the time. **Always work on the assumption that at least one student in the class has been affected by mental health issues discussed in lessons (either personally or through experience with a family member or friend.)**

Use ground rules for classroom discussions. This will help keep the discussion respectful and prevent it from contributing to further stigmatisation of mental health issues. Students might feel uncomfortable discussing certain issues, so never force anyone to share or contribute.

Distance topics from students by encouraging them to think and talk about sensitive topics in the third person. This will help to prevent personal examples being raised and reduce emotional responses to sensitive topics discussed. For example, help students think about what someone 'like them' might experience, feel, think, say or do: 'Can you imagine a young person about your age, and who...?' 'How might you advise a friend in this scenario...?'

Be aware that this lesson may lead to a discussion of self-harm and eating disorders. These are highly sensitive topics and may be distressing for some students in your class. Warn students well in advance of the lesson that body image will be covered and give them the option to withdraw from the lesson. This lesson aims to give students enough information to recognise negative body image so that they can seek help when needed. It is not about giving them an in-depth knowledge of specific mental health conditions. Never talk about specific ways in which people harm themselves or hide their self-harm, as this could avoid instruction to students who are vulnerable in this area. Similarly, never discuss ways in which people lose weight or hide disordered eating. Never give specific numbers when discussing weight loss, or share extreme images, as this can provide an aspirational example for young people at risk of eating disorders.

Talk to your school or college's mental health, wellbeing, pastoral, or safeguarding lead before delivering the lesson. This will flag to them that there may be students in your class seeking further help for body image related issues after your lesson. They should also provide you with support and guidance for covering sensitive issues.

In the lesson, always put the emphasis on seeking help and support. The information and activities in this lesson are intended to be practical; they are aimed at giving students the language, information, and confidence to seek support, as needed, for themselves or others.

Teacher's slide – FAQs

Students may have additional questions after completing this lesson. This page is intended to give you answers to questions that aren't covered in the main lesson.

Why do people have a negative body image? Fluctuations in body image can cause everyone to have self-conscious days, however, some people feel this more strongly and on a more permanent basis. These feelings can be linked to a range of different factors. They may be internal or external. These factors might include body shape, bullying, fatphobia, gender stereotypes and presentation, unhelpful thoughts, racism, sexualisation, ableism, or puberty.

What do I do if I have a negative body image? To improve your body image, you need to identify the negative beliefs you have about yourself, then challenge them. This is certainly easier said than done! These beliefs may have been around for a while, and there are lots of external factors that can make us feel less happy with our appearances. So, you may want to reach out to a trusted teacher, school counselor, or family member for support when you do this.

Why is your body image actually important? A healthy body image goes beyond what you think of yourself in the mirror. It strongly links to your self-esteem, self-compassion, and ability to recognise the strengths and qualities that make you unique beyond your weight, shape, or appearance. A healthy self-esteem allows us to feel positive about ourselves and be able to deal with life's ups and downs. But when a negative body image becomes a long-term problem, it can have a harmful effect on our mental health and our day-to-day lives. It makes it difficult to feel good and be kind to ourselves.

What does negative body image look like? If someone has a negative body image, they may have unhelpful thoughts of self-criticism, shame, or anger. They may hide themselves away from social situations, stop trying new things, and experience mood swings. They may take extreme measures to change, control, or avoid seeing their body. In the short term, this might make them feel safe. But in the longer term, this can reinforce their doubts and fears about their body.

Social media is a key trigger of my negative body image. How can I change this? Creating a healthier body image involves unlearning the beliefs about your body that you've picked up from social media. It can be helpful to practise recognising harmful messages and advertising, block friends and groups that share unhelpful content, and diversify the accounts you follow so lots of different appearances are represented. As before, this unlearning process is not easy, and it is really okay to reach out to a trusted teacher, school counselor, or family member for support when you do this.

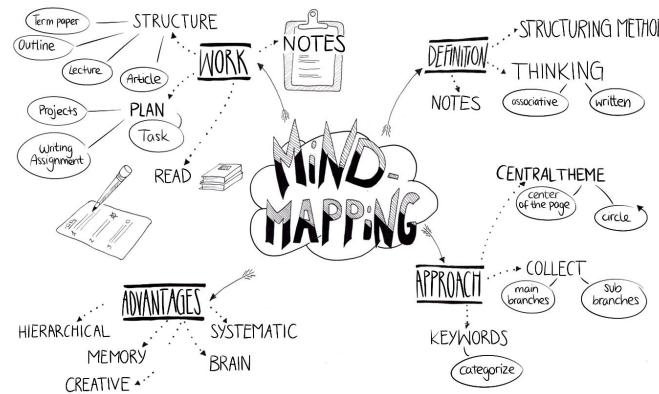
People at school/college say negative things about my appearance. What can I do about this? It is incredibly difficult to keep up a healthy body image and self-esteem if you're experiencing bullying. It is really okay to ask for help. It is not your fault, and you do not need to change your body in any way even if the bullying encourages this. Please speak to a trusted teacher or school counselor if you're experiencing bullying. If you are ever in urgent danger of physical harm, you can contact the police by dialling 999 in the UK, and 911 in the USA.

Starting point: how does influencer culture affect teenage identity and self-worth?

Is influence always positive?

Do boys and girls experience the same pressures online?

Mindmap how these might be similar or different. Click for suggestions afterwards!



Boys

- muscularity,
- status,
- confidence,
- emotional control,
- success,
- dominance.

Girls

- beauty standards,
- thinness,
- sexualisation,
- perfection,
- beauty routines,
- appearance-based validation.

What is body image? (5 mins)

Body image consists of the **thoughts** and **feelings** someone has about their own body. Body image can be positive, negative, or neutral.

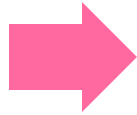
- Make a list of at least **three** things that could influence someone's body image.



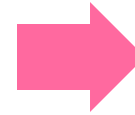
Thoughts, feelings, and behaviours (15 mins)

When someone has negative thoughts about their body image, this can lead to poor wellbeing and mental ill health, which can result in harmful behaviours.

Thoughts



Feelings



Behaviours

Write down your answers for each scenario:

1. What may have contributed to their negative body image?
2. In what ways could their current actions be harmful?
3. What different actions could they take to support their wellbeing?

Ed and his friends go to the gym several times a week to stay fit and healthy. Recently, Ed's friends have made jokes about him having smaller muscles than them. Ed sees a social media post from an influencer promoting muscle growth pills and decides to order them.



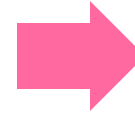
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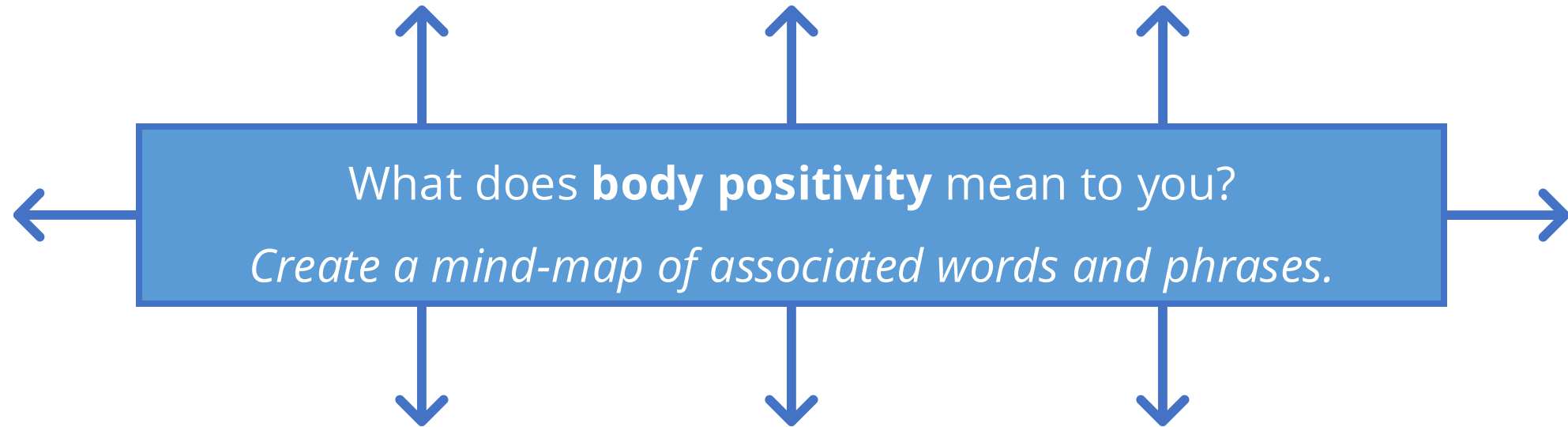
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Milly isn't happy with her current social media profile photo as it *'doesn't look like everyone else's.'* Milly takes a selfie and then uses an editing app to change her skin tone, blur out blemishes, and make her eyes look bigger. She tags the photo as #naturalisbest.



What is body positivity? (10 mins)



Research shows that body positivity is associated with better self-care, healthy diets, healthy exercise, less unhealthy dieting, and a lower risk of depression.

What is body positivity?



Why does the statement below **not** represent body positivity?

"We should all aspire to be thin, for the benefit of our physical health."



What could be the negative consequences if this is the only message about body image that people are exposed to?

Video clip

Watch [this video clip](#).

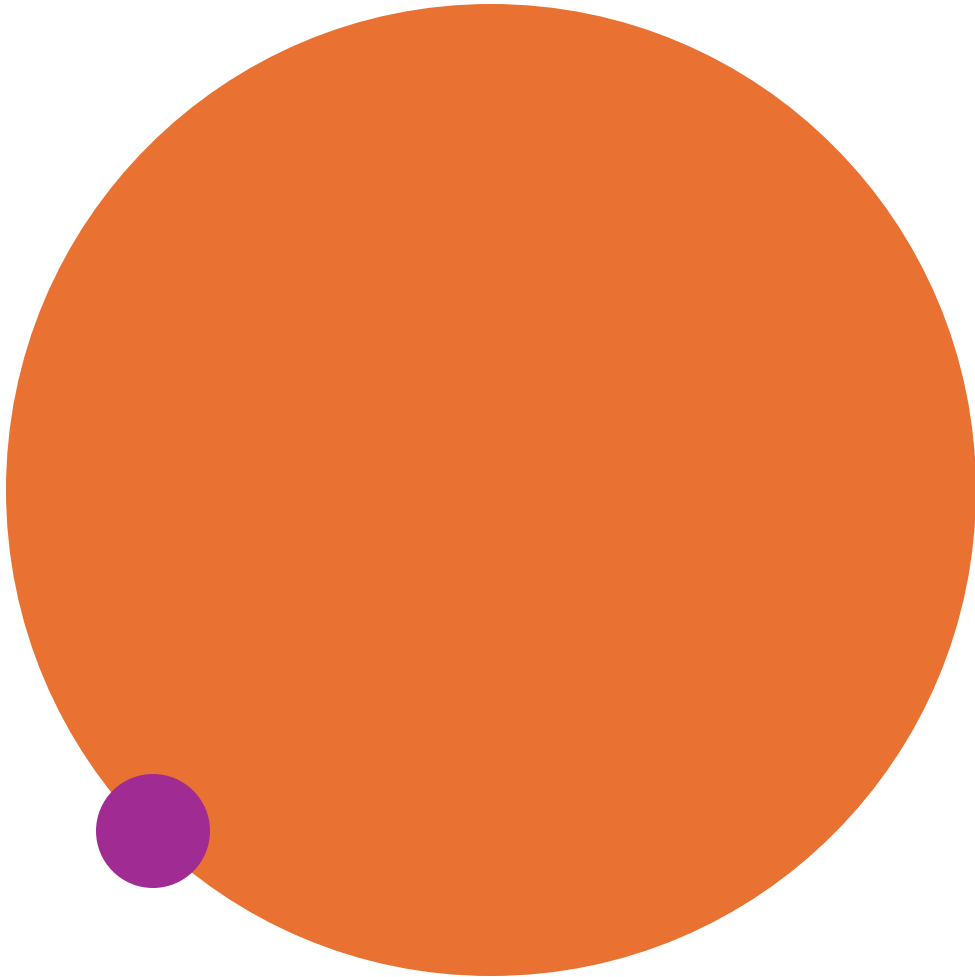
What do you think about the advice given? Is it helpful?

Are there any tips that are unrealistic?

Is there anything about this video that you didn't like?

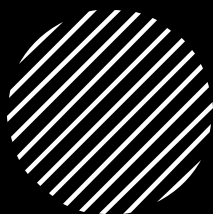


Who influences teenagers most today?



Note down 3 major influences on young people today. Then rank them from most influential to least. Click for possible suggestions; did your list include any of these?

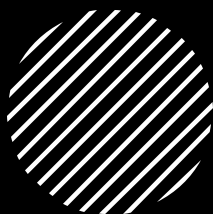
- **parents,**
- **friends,**
- **celebrities,**
- **TikTok creators,**
- **YouTubers,**
- **sports stars,**
- **musicians,**
- **online communities.**



Research - Influencers and social media

There is now a substantial amount of **research** showing that influencers and social media can have both **positive and negative effects** on teenagers.

Most researchers now argue that the impact depends on how long teenagers spend online, what kind of content they consume, their existing mental health and how critically they engage with what they see.



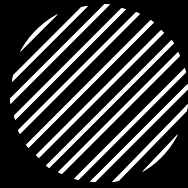
Research findings - Body image & appearance pressure

The [Mental Health Foundation](#) found that **40% of young people** said images on social media caused them to worry about their body image. This included **54% of girls** and **26% of boys**.

The same research found that more than **1 in 3 teenagers** had restricted eating because of worries about body image.

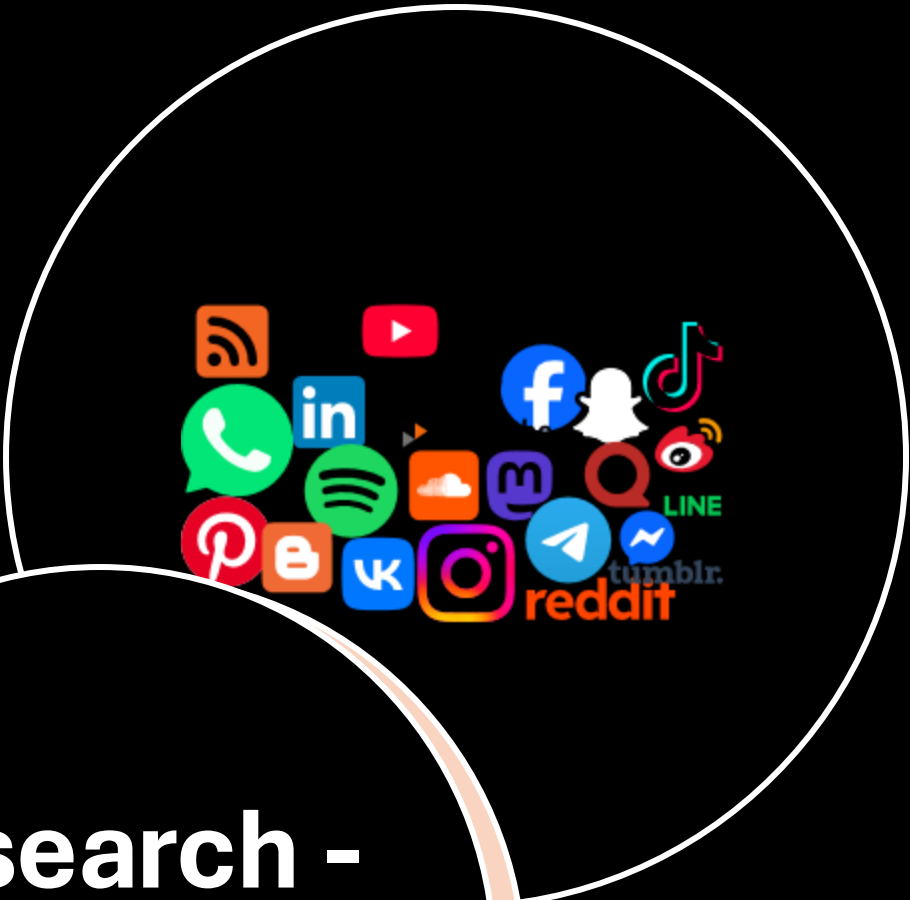
Researchers increasingly note that **boys are also affected** by muscularity pressure, gym culture, “perfect body” ideals and appearance comparison online.

Research - Anxiety, depression & self-esteem

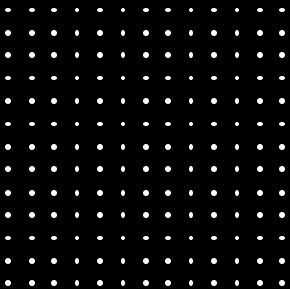


A review published through [PubMed Central \(PMC\)](#) concluded that social media exposure is linked to lower self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, and poorer emotional wellbeing in adolescents.

A 2025 [University of Cambridge](#) study found that adolescents with mental health conditions will spend more time on social media, compare themselves to others more often and are more emotionally affected by likes/comments.



Research - Mental health awareness

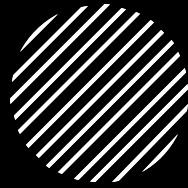


Some creators have helped normalise:

- therapy,
- emotional openness,
- body positivity,
- discussions around loneliness or stress.

A 2025 study on influencers delivering mental health/body image support found many adolescent girls saw potential benefits in relatable influencer-led wellbeing content.

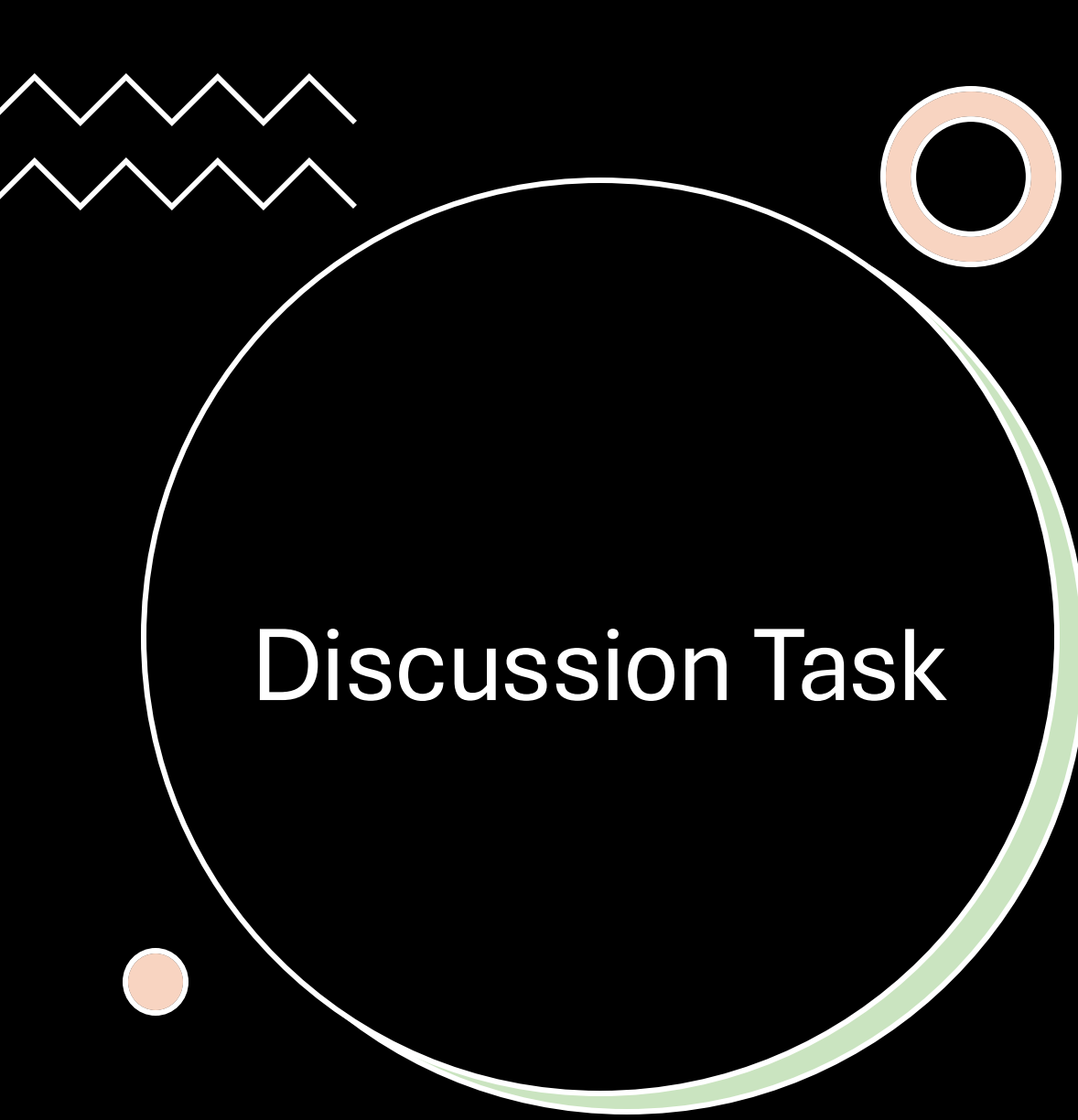
Research -
Moderate use
may be healthier
than extreme use



Some research suggests *moderate* social media use may actually support wellbeing through:

- communication,
- entertainment,
- belonging,
- and creativity.

A large Australian survey found moderate users (1–3 hours daily) often reported better wellbeing outcomes than both very low and very high users.



Discussion Task

1. Why do influencers affect teenagers so strongly?
 2. Why do people compare themselves online?
 3. Should influencers be responsible for their audience's wellbeing?
 4. Are algorithms partly responsible for mental health problems?
 5. Can influencers also be positive role models?
- 

Influencers - Agree or disagree?

“Social media affects girls’ confidence more than boys’ confidence.”

“Teenagers compare themselves more online than in real life.”

“Most influencers present unrealistic lifestyles.”

“Social media can make people feel lonely even when they are constantly connected.”

“Boys are under increasing pressure to look attractive online.”

“Girls face more appearance pressure online than boys.”

“Influencers often profit from people’s insecurities.”

“Social media can positively support mental health.”

“Likes and followers affect teenagers’ self-esteem.”

“People behave differently online than they do in real life.”

Video clip

Watch [this video](#). (6 mins approx.) It's from 8 years ago and is a discussion on how body image and appearance anxiety for boys is on the rise. Do you think this changed since the discussion took place? Has it got worse?



Influencers and commercialised insecurity

Many people believe that a lot of online industries profit from insecurity. For example, supplements and skincare. What other examples are there?

Influencers often sell not just products, but lifestyles and identities.

Different pressures but similar effects

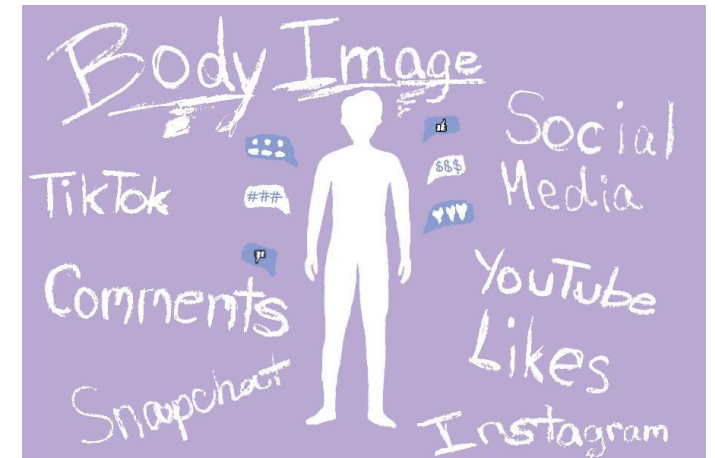
These are typical online pressures commonly aimed at boys:

- being muscular,
- emotionally dominant,
- wealthy,
- “high status,”
- successful with relationships.

And these online pressures are commonly aimed at girls:

- being attractive,
- slim but curvy,
- constantly polished,
- desirable,
- socially validated.

What do you think both groups have in common in terms of effects from these pressures?





Algorithms & Reinforcement

Social media platforms reward user engagement, emotion, aspiration, outrage and comparison.

Algorithms quickly personalise feeds. Repeated exposure often normalises extreme standards and content can shape a user's beliefs over time.

For example, dieting content, gym culture, “perfect life” content, relationship advice, appearance-focused trends.



Parasocial Relationships

Parasocial relationships are “One-sided emotional connections with online personalities.”

One of the common traits of a successful influencer is that he/she feels relatable.

Audiences feel emotionally invested therefore creators can strongly shape opinions and someone’s feeling of self-worth.

- **Why do people trust influencers?**
- **Can influencers replace real role models or friendships?**
- **What are the risks?**



Discussion

Is influencer culture more harmful or positive?

Do you think that social media platforms should do more to protect teenagers from harmful influencer culture?

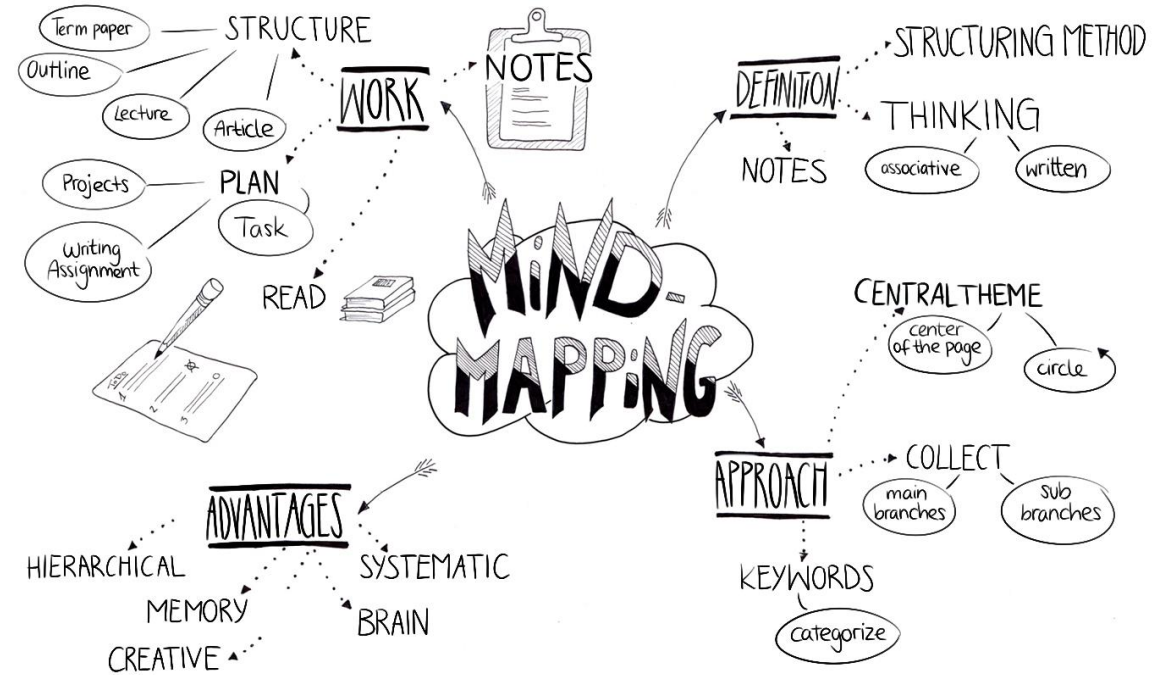
Think about:

- **Responsibility of Influencers**
- **Responsibility of Platforms**
- **Responsibility of Users**

Healthy identity online

Task: Complete the following sentence: “A healthy online culture would include...”.

Task: Now go back to your Mindmap. What can you now add to it from today’s lesson to make it more detailed?



Optional video task

Watch [this video](#). What do you think is actually going on? What is the key message?



UK Support Services for Teenagers

[Childline](#) Free and confidential Phone: **0800 1111** 24/7 support
Chat and message services available.

[YoungMinds](#) Mental health information specifically for young people.

[NHS Every Mind Matters](#)

[Mind](#)

[Beat Eating Disorders](#)

[The Mix](#) Support for under-25s

Independent learning

It can be difficult to know which information you can trust online. The **Know-how library** is a reliable source of information about this topic and lots of others.

[‘Understanding body image’](#)

[‘Understanding BDD’](#)

Search by the keyword ‘body image’ in the Know-how library to find guides on this topic. Remember to favourite guides you’d like to come back to later!



Understanding body image



How to look after the relationship you have with your body

[Read the guide >](#)



Understanding BDD



What it is and how to get help

[Read the guide >](#)

Managing body image and influences (5 mins)

You've noticed that a friend of yours is concerned about their body image:

'I hate the way my body looks. I wish it looked more like the ones in magazines.'

What information and advice could you give to your friend to help them manage **unrealistic expectations** from the media and think about body image more **positively**?

Use the sentence starters to help:

- *Images in magazines are usually...*
- *It's important to remember...*
- *You might find it helpful to...*

Managing body image and influences

Here are some examples of techniques to manage body image concerns:



Unfollow social media accounts that don't make you feel good about yourself

Be critical of images in the media. Stop and think: *has this image been edited?*

Surround yourself with body-positive people! 

Identify and challenge negative thoughts: 
where is the evidence?

Seek information or support from an organisation like Young Minds. 



Take time to appreciate your non-physical traits too.



Focus on your body's abilities.

Avoid comparisons: *every body is unique!* 

Organisations that help with body image

Searching 'body image advice' in your internet browser will bring up helpful resources and guide you with the first step in finding support.

- **Young Minds** (information about body image) - youngminds.org.uk/young-person/coping-with-life/body-image
- **Childline** (free confidential support for all issues, including body image) - childline.org.uk
- **The Mix** (support for under 25s) - themix.org.uk/your-body
- **Be Real** (body confidence campaign) - berealcampaign.co.uk
- **Papyrus** (prevention of young suicide) - papyrus-uk.org/body-positivity
- **Mental Health Foundation** (mental health charity) - mentalhealth.org.uk
- **Mind** (information about mental health conditions, treatments, and wellbeing) - mind.org.uk
- **Mental Health Foundation** (articles about body image) - mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/body-image