

LANGUAGE

Language

Even in the form of compliments, comments about body or appearance can adversely affect self-esteem, confidence, the pleasure derived from being active, and even performance. Carefully choosing one's words is crucial, therefore, and the PHE teacher can make all the difference between a rewarding experience and its opposite. Teenage girls can be extremely sensitive to comments about their appearance or abilities, and certain words, even when meant to be funny, can reinforce stereotypes whereby boys' physical abilities take precedence, to the detriment of those of girls.

Important

- 1 Avoid any comments about weight and body shape, whether they are self-directed or directed at someone else, or stated as a generalization.
- 2 To help students feel good about themselves, comment instead on their qualities, personality traits and attitude.
- 3 Steer clear of discriminatory expressions, such as "throw like a girl", which suggests that it's normal for girls' abilities to be inferior to those of boys.

"You've lost weight, you look fit!"

It is wrong to presume that an individual's health or physical condition is based on their weight. Life habits (physical activity, nutrition, sleep, stress management, etc.) are much better determinants of health, and comments about weight have no place.

Activities for girls or boys?

Stereotypes can still seem daunting to a boy who is interested in doing an artistic activity or a girl who wants to practice a male-dominated sport. This leads youth, boys and girls, to exclude themselves from a sport in which participation is associated mostly with the opposite sex.

Physical activity to burn calories

Messaging that associates physical activity with a desire to transform one's body is ubiquitous, particularly on social media. The benefits of regular physical activity practiced in a healthy context are sufficiently powerful to be promoted without referring to calories, weight loss or body transformation.



Paths for reflection

- Do you have a tendency to compliment your colleagues or students when they lose weight?
- Do you use expressions like "girl push-up"? Or are you inclined to favour easier variations while describing them (e.g. knee push-up)?
- Do you talk about or make assumptions concerning people's physical condition based on their weight or body shape?
- Do you ever tout an exercise as a solution for getting rid of arm or belly fat or for having more attractive buttocks?

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