

SAFEGUARDING ADOLESCENTS

STRATEGY GUIDE

Theme: Body Image and Eating Disorders

Introduction

Body image

Body image is a person's emotional attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of their own body. Young people can be affected by poor body image and may feel conscious about the way they look. Having body image concerns is a relatively common experience; however, it can be a risk factor for mental health problems as higher body dissatisfaction can be associated with a poorer quality of life, psychological distress and the risk of unhealthy eating behaviors and eating disorders.



Body image can be influenced by a number of factors including:

- Family relationships
- Friends and peers
- Social media
- Long-term health conditions
- Cultural differences
- Gender and sexuality

An online survey of British young people aged 13 to 19 by the Mental Health Foundation (2019) was commissioned as part of Mental Health Awareness Week 2019, which had the theme of body image.

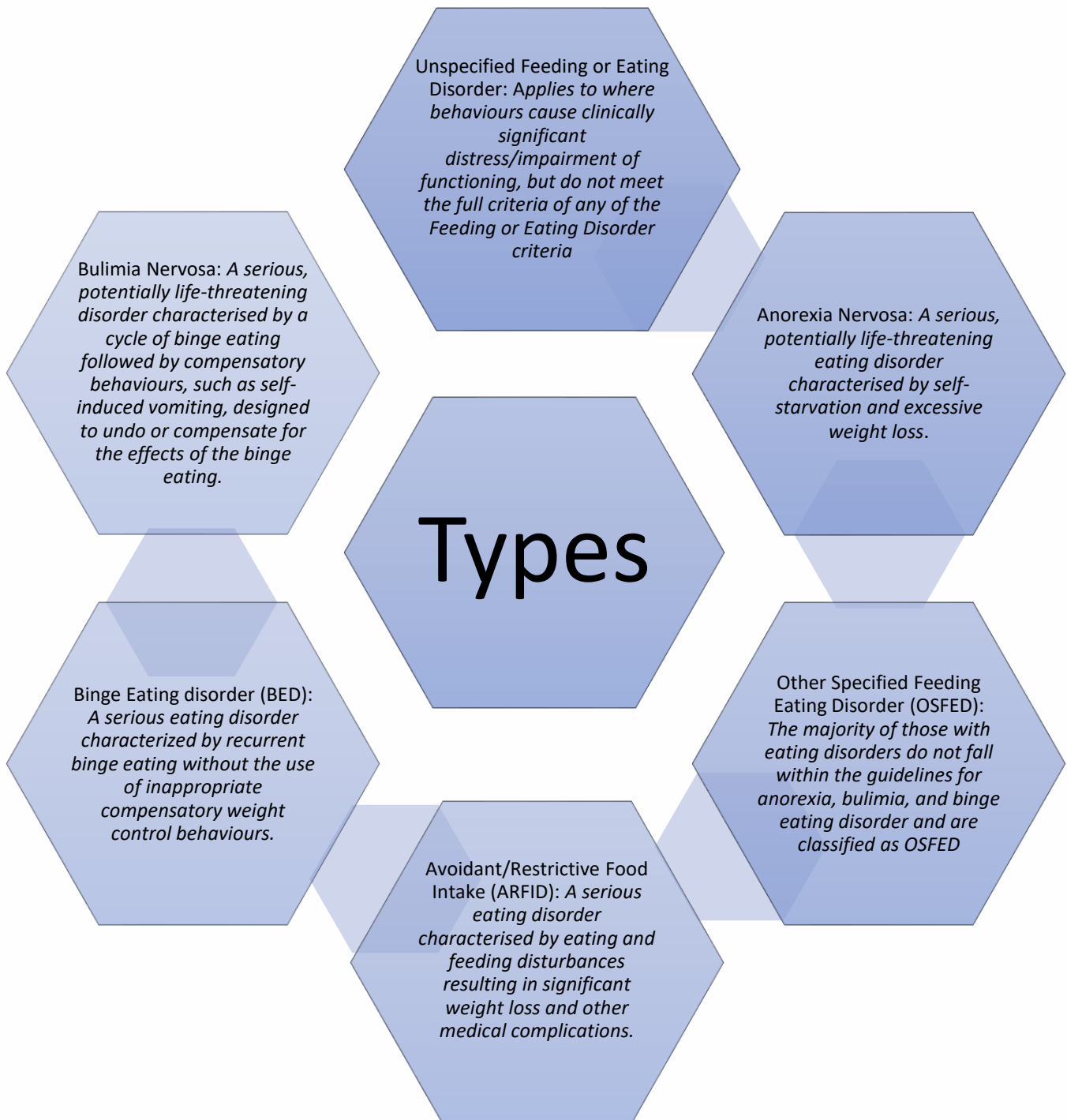
The survey concluded:

- **One-third (31%)** of teenagers felt ashamed in relation to their body image.
- **Four in ten (40%)** said images on social media had caused them to worry about body image.
- **More than a third (35%)** had stopped eating at some point or, restricted their diets because of worrying about their body image.
- **Four in ten teenagers (40%)** said that things their friends have said have made them worry about their body image.
- **35%** of teenagers worried in relation to their body image often or every day.
- **37%** of teenagers felt upset and ashamed in relation to their body image.

A public health approach is key to support professionals and front line staff from both a health and educational perspective and can influence social media to promote body kindness. It is important as professionals that we can recognise some of the symptoms/triggers associated with poor body image and look at collective ways to support positive body image and positive mental health.

Feeding and eating disorders

Approximately 1.25 million people in the UK have an eating disorder. Twenty-five percent of those affected are male. Although children as young as six can develop an eating disorder, they are most common in young people from the age of 16. They are a serious condition related to persistent eating behaviours that negatively impact on a young person's health, emotions and ability to function.



Some symptoms of eating disorders a professional may notice:

- Changes in mood - depression/withdrawn.
- Dramatic weight loss/fluctuating weight.
- Exercising a lot.
- Menstrual irregularities/anaemia.
- Sleep problems.
- Fainting/dizziness.
- Difficulties concentrating.
- Discoloration of teeth from vomiting/dental problems.
- Poor wound healing.
- Dry skin/brittle nails.

Signs of poor body image a professional may notice:

- Focuses excessive attention on a minor flaw in appearance.
- Views oneself as unattractive, even ugly.
- Fears other people can see the so-called deformity.
- Avoids social engagements.
- Constantly grooms and looks at oneself in the mirror.
- Constantly hides the perceived flaw with makeup or clothes.
- Constantly compares one's appearance with other peoples.
- Pursues excessive cosmetic procedures or surgery.
- Needs reassurance from others.

LGBTQIA* communities face additional stressors when it comes to body image. It is important for professionals to be aware of discrimination and bullying factors. Young people may face discordance between their body and gender.

Experiences of chronic illness, particularly those where the effects are physically visible, have been associated with greater body image concerns.

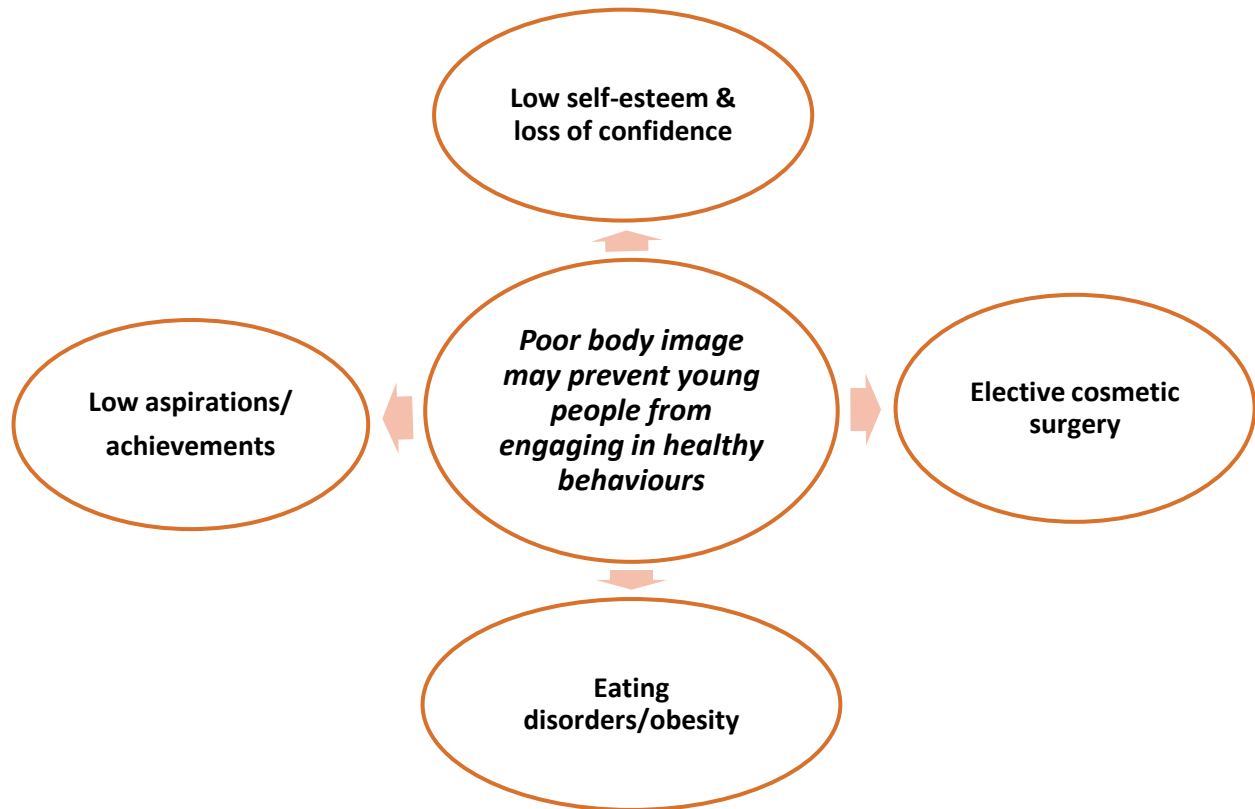
Some research suggests that individuals with autism spectrum disorder can experience their bodies differently than neurotypical peers, and that this may affect how they think and feel about their bodies, though research in this area is still developing.

There is little research on the body image of individuals with learning disabilities. However, these young people are often at a greater risk of obesity than their peers and has been linked to increased feelings of body dissatisfaction.

* Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, and asexual

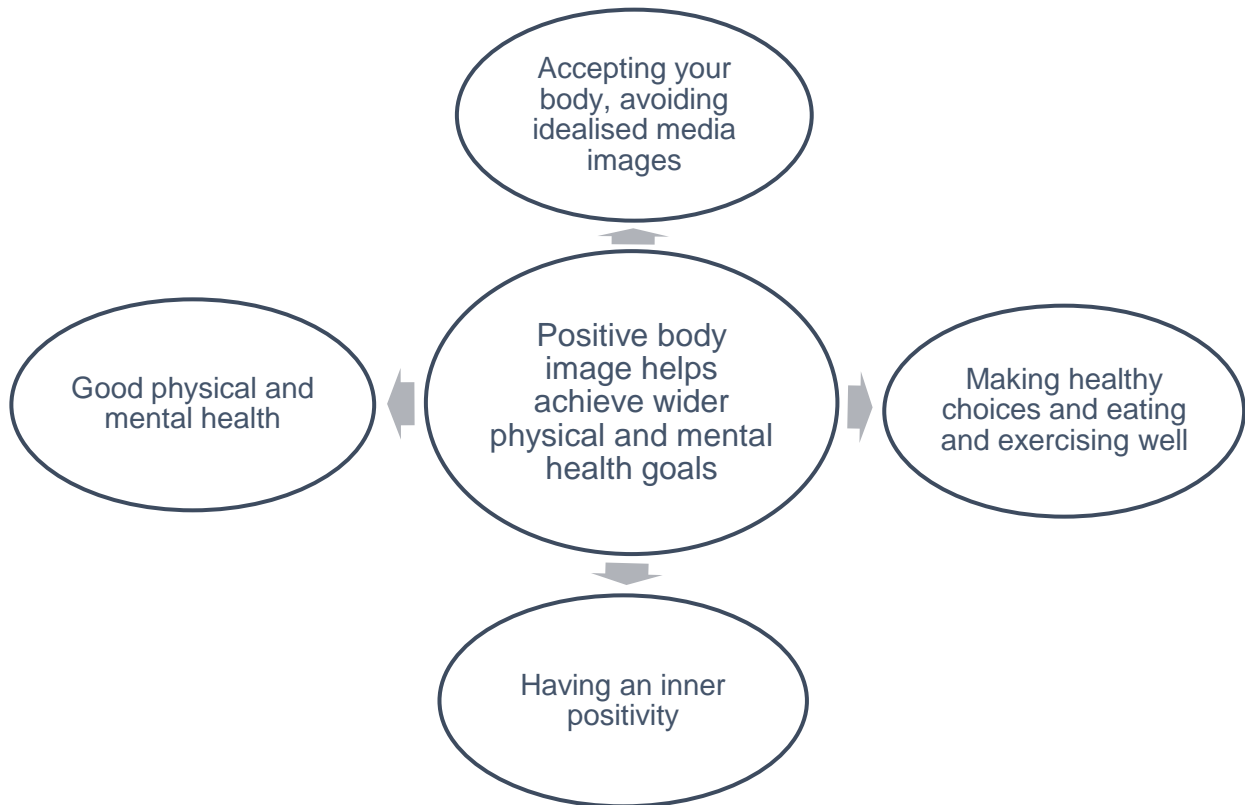
What is the impact on safeguarding adolescents?

Poor body image is associated with:



- Low self-esteem may lead to young people engaging in self-harm and may need a multi-agency approach, including, social care, education, Early Help and health to look at different considerations in the child's life.
- Low aspirations and achievement in young people are five times more likely to face challenges affected by poverty in adulthood.
- Elective cosmetic surgery on young people who are physically and emotionally immature, can make them extremely vulnerable to potentially life-long implications.
- Eating disorders continue to have severe psychological, physical, and social consequences. It is vital young people and families access support quickly and effectively.

Positive body image is associated with:



It is important that professionals continue to promote positive body image to empower and encourage young people to promote this themselves and through their peers.

Additional Resources and Information

Local

[Wessex Healthier together](#) - Aimed at improving the health of children and young people in Dorset, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

[4LSCP](#) - Managing self-harm resource for practitioners, parents and carers supporting children and young people.

[Safeguarding Adolescents, Strategy Guide 14: Mental health, well-being and self-harm](#)

Isle of Wight

[IOW Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service \(CAMHS\)](#) - Provide a service to children and young people aged 0–18-year-olds, and their families, who are experiencing emotional health and wellbeing difficulties, including eating disorders.

Telephone: 01983 523602 (answer phone out of hours)

Email: iownt.spcamhs@nhs.net

[Children in Care & Care Leavers Nurse Team](#) - Delivers direct clinical contact, advice and support to Children in Care/Care Leavers, their carers and social workers to address health issues unique to this group of children and young people. This includes emotional well-being.

Telephone: 01983 524081

Email: IOW.childrenincare@nhs.net

[Public Health Nursing 0-19 years](#) - The Isle of Wight 0-19 Public Health Nursing Team offer services to all children under 19 who live on the Isle of Wight including those currently in elective home education.

Telephone: 01983 821388 extension 1

Email: iownt.0-19dutydesk@nhs.net

[Isle of Wight Youth Trust](#) - Offers a range of support for children, young people and their families, providing a professional one-to-one counselling service. They also offer group work, training and other early-intervention opportunities.

Telephone: 01983 529569

Email: info@iowyouthtrust.co.uk

[Barnardo's Talk 2 Service](#) - A confidential therapeutic counselling service for children and young people that provides support for children's mental health and wellbeing that is child directed, systems focused, strengths based and outcome informed.

Telephone: 01983 865657

Email: talk2@barnardos.org.uk

[Safe Haven](#) - Offers face-to-face mental health support sessions for children and young people.

Telephone: call to pre-book is 07741 665182

Hampshire

[Hampshire Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services \(CAMHS\)](#) - An NHS service that aims to help young people up to the age of 18 who are finding it hard to manage their emotional and psychological health, and who are suffering with acute, chronic and severe mental health problems. This includes support with self-esteem.

Telephone: 0300 304 0050

Email: SPNT.HantsCamhsSpa@nhs.net

[The 0-19 year's Public Health Service for Hampshire](#) - Health visiting, school nursing and Family Nurse Partnership services are based on national priorities for public health and the health and wellbeing of Hampshire's 0-19 children, young people and their families.

Telephone: ChatHealth Young People 07507 332 160

Email: childrenscomms@southernhealth.nhs.uk

[Hampshire Youth Access \(HYA\)](#) - A partnership of 11 leading agencies providing counselling, information, advice, and support to children and young people aged 5 to 17 across Hampshire. They also offer advice and information to anyone concerned about a child or young person's emotional wellbeing.

Telephone: 02382 147 755

Email: enquiries@hampshireyouthaccess.org.uk

[Safe Haven](#) - Provide out-of-hours support to young people experiencing, or on the verge of, mental health crisis. Anyone aged between 10 and 17 who needs support for a mental health crisis can drop in to receive help.

National

[NHS Choices](#) - Healthy choices

[Mind](#) - For Better Mental Health

[National Centre for Eating Disorders](#)

[NSPCC](#)

[NHS England](#)

Resources and training

[BEAT](#) - Free training available.

[FREED](#) - Free training for all NHS staff.

[MindEd Hub](#) - Free training available.

[Young Minds](#) – A suite of courses to support professionals.

[Mental Health First Aid \(Youth\)](#) - Two-day courses: £300 pp, one day courses: £200 pp, half day courses: £75.

[We Can Talk](#) - Free training and fee training available

[Healthy London Partnerships](#) - Free resources.

[Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families](#) - Free resources.

[BEAT Schools resources 'Spot the signs'](#) - Free resources.

[National Centre for Eating Disorders: ARFID and Autism](#) - Free resources.

[NICE Guidelines](#) - Covers assessment, treatment, monitoring and inpatient care for children, young people and adults with eating disorders. It aims to improve the care people receive by detailing the most effective treatments for anorexia nervosa, binge eating disorder and bulimia nervosa.

Body image

[National Centre for Eating Disorders](#) - Body image.

[National Citizen Service Body Image Toolkit](#) - It aims to engage young people with the issues around body image and inspire and guide them to utilise their understanding to promote positive body image in themselves and others through social action.

Further studies

[Somebody like me](#) - A report investigating the impact of body image and anxiety in the UK. YMCA (2017).

[Body Image report](#) - National Health Foundation (2019).

References

Mental Health Foundation (2019). [Body Image: How We Think And Feel About Our Bodies. Accessed 22 November 2021.](#)