

# BODY DIVERSITY & BODY INCLUSIVITY

## BASICS ON HOW TO FOSTER A BODY DIVERSE AND BODY INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

### WHAT DO WE MEAN?

Physical activity has numerous benefits for physical and psychological well-being. Yet, a key barrier to physical activity is *body concern*: worry that one's own body does not "measure up" or will be judged by others. Although sports centres aim to promote well-being, they often perpetuate body concerns by idolizing specific body ideals (e.g., youth, leanness, ability) and emphasizing physical activity for appearance rather than health or leisure.

Our aim is to do the opposite: fostering a body diverse and body inclusive environment where *every body*, regardless weight, age, gender expression, ethnicity, physical ability, and other characteristics – feels welcome to engage in physical activity. We also aim for people to feel positive about their body, because this will encourage them to take good care of themselves and enhances well-being.



#### THE 6 PILLARS OF BODY FUNCTIONALITY

**Physical capacities**

**Health and internal processes**

**Senses**

**Creative expression**

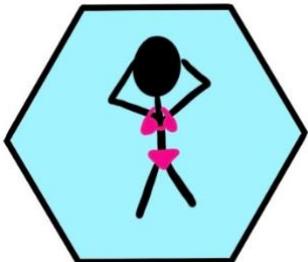
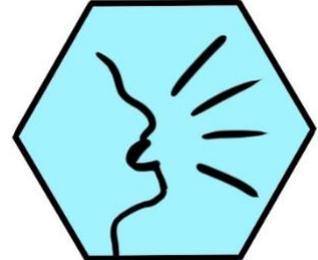
**Self-care**

**Communication**



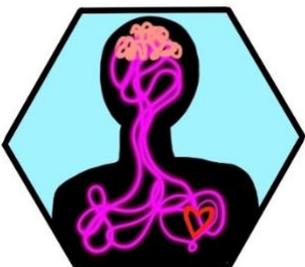
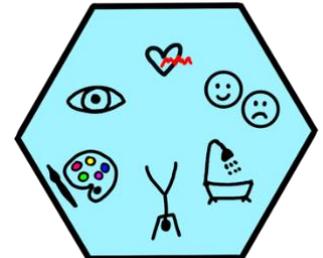
People can feel better about their body by focusing on their own body functionality; what your body can *do*, rather than how it *looks*. For example, writing about what your body can do, and why that is important to you, has been shown to increase appearance satisfaction, functionality satisfaction, body appreciation, and self-esteem.

Functionality-focused language in sports classes has been shown to increase body satisfaction. Focusing on what you and your participants' body can *do* fosters a healthier relationship to physical activity and higher well-being.



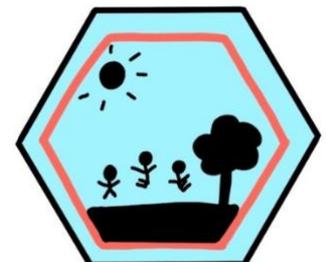
Avoid appearance-focused language, such as comments about body shape or weight, or changing one's appearance. Appearance-focused language promotes a more negative body image, and an unhealthy relationship to physical activity and food.

Promote body appreciation and gratitude, rather than body shame and self-criticism. Focus on highlighting the meaningful things that our bodies can do for us.

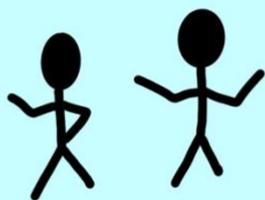


A more positive attitude toward one's body helps to increase flow and awareness of internal body states, while decreasing body shame and anxiety. It allows one to be present in themselves and their body, without harsh self-criticism or judgement. This can lead to better sport performance and more enjoyment of physical activity.

Taking all these points into consideration when leading a training session or during your own training helps to foster a more positive body image, leading to better exercise quality, and greater overall physical and mental health of you and your participants.



## POINTS IN PRACTICE



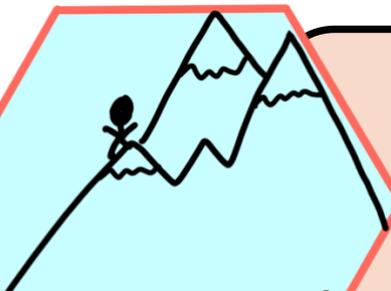
### Discourage Comparison

Discourage any form of comparison and emphasise that it does not matter what the person next to you is doing, or what you as an instructor are doing. Studies show that comparing yourself to others has a negative impact on wellbeing, regardless of whether you think you are better or worse than other people.



### Plan options in advance

When planning your class or training session, consider different options for the exercises. For example, push-ups can be done on knees, toes, or going down halfway. High knees can be a substitute for mountain climbers, without pressure on the shoulders. Avoid labelling your options as “easy, medium and hard”. Rather, keep your labels ability-neutral such as “a, b, c,” to encourage people to listen to their own body.



### Encourage personal boundaries

Encourage individuals to be mindful of their personal abilities. This includes accepting and respecting that your body has its unique boundaries, and that these boundaries can vary from day to day, as well as taking a non-judgemental stance toward yourself and your body. Learning to read your body’s cues is a valuable exercise for both yourself and your participants.

## INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

Be aware of your language choices when guiding participants. Avoid stereotypes regarding gender, ability, and body weight/size. This means making your participants feel welcome and included regardless of potential differentiating characteristics. After all, everyone is warmly welcome at UM SPORTS, and we proudly embody this in all our activities.

GENDER



ABILITY



WEIGHT



## WHAT TO SAY

- “You are strong!”
- “Think of all the amazing things your body can do!”
- “C’mon, let’s get those great leg muscles working!”
- “This exercise will make your back strong and prevent injuries!”
- “Your body gives you power!”
- “This is great for your posture!”
- “Your technique is improving!”
- “This helps you reduce stress and focus on your studies/work later.”
- “Everyone can come to UM SPORTS and have a great workout!”

## WHAT NOT TO SAY

- “Blast that fat!”
- “Don’t waste your time, give 200%!”
- “This exercise will get rid of that muffin-top!”
- “C’mon let’s get those leg muscles working, flabby thighs won’t get you anywhere!”
- “Think where your body will be when you’re finished! It will be toned, trimmed, and ready to hit the beach!”
- “Work hard or go home!”
- “Summer bodies are made in winter!”
- “Everyone can come to UM SPORTS and lose weight/change their body/get their dream body”