



LESSON PLAN

Level: Grades 5 to 8
About the Author: Adapted from Smoke-Free for Life, from the Nova Scotia Department of Health, Drug Dependency and Tobacco Control Unit

Image Gap

Overview

This lesson helps students understand how self-image can influence lifestyle choices. Students begin by identifying those qualities they admire most in peers, and by comparing their self-image with these qualities. They learn to identify self-image "problems" and develop positive strategies for dealing with these problems.

Learning Outcomes

Students will demonstrate:

- an awareness of the role that self-esteem plays in guiding lifestyle choices
- an ability to implement positive strategies to counter poor self-image

Preparation and Materials

Prepare to distribute following student handouts:

- *Image Gap*
- *Image Gap: Problems and Strategies*
- *Evaluation: Image Gap: What I'm Told vs. What I Tell Myself*

If you are doing the optional extension activity, prepare to distribute the handouts *Tobacco, Self-Image and Self-Esteem* and *Be Your Own Best Friend*

Procedure

Guided Activity: 10 min

Distribute the *Image Gap* questionnaire and lead students through each step. In Part A, students check the five qualities they admire most in others. Then they copy those five qualities onto the lines in Part B. Ask students to think about how these qualities apply to them and then circle a number between one and ten to indicate how much each quality applies.

Class Discussion: 10 min

- What do we mean by "self-image"? (*how we see ourselves*)



- What is our "ideal self-image"? (*how we'd like to be; the qualities we admire in others*)
- The difference between self-image and ideal self-image can be called our "image gap."
- Is there a big gap between how you'd like to be and how you see yourself?
- How does this gap feel? When does it become a "problem"? How do you try to solve the problem?

There are two basic approaches to solving an image gap problem: we try to change the way we are, or we try to change our self-image by becoming more accepting of ourselves. Example:

Problem: I wish I looked more attractive.

Strategy 1: I could change the way I look by dressing better, using babysitting money to buy new clothes, losing some weight. But I can't really change most of the way I look.

Strategy 2: I could change the way I see myself by being less critical, not comparing myself to others so much, and by focusing more on my strong points - such as my nice hair, or my great sense of humour.

- How does each strategy make us feel about ourselves?
- When is one type of strategy more appropriate than the other?

Individual Activity:

- Ask students to complete *Image Gap: Problems and Strategies*.
- Ask students how they identified which strategies were the "best strategy" for different problems (they don't have to say what the problem or even the specific strategy was—just how they decided which strategy was the best for each problem.)
- Ask students to share their answers to question 2 of part B—what did they learn from the exercise?

Assessment/Evaluation Activity

- Ask students to complete *Image Gap: What I'm Told vs. What I Tell Myself*. Then take up the questions on the handout: did they identify a "gap" between what media tells them and what they tell themselves? If so, what do they think causes it? If not, do they think other people feel there is a "gap"? (This may be a good time to tell students about the "third person effect": most people believe that media affect *other* people more than themselves even though logically that can't be true.)

Extension Activity (for older classes)

Give students a few minutes to read *World Tobacco, Self-Image and Self-Esteem* or read through it with the class. Before asking the following questions, remind students that there is no right or wrong answer here. The purpose of this exercise is to get them to think about their own feelings on this topic, so they should feel free to answer these questions honestly.

- Do you agree or disagree with the idea that teens with low self-esteem and negative self-image are more likely to smoke or vape than teens with positive self-image? Why or why not?



- How many of you have friends or relatives who smoke or vape to deal with "stress" or worries? Does it seem to work?
- Think of teens you know who smoke or vape. Would you describe them as attractive, popular or mature?
- Think of your five best friends. Do any of them smoke or vape? Do most of you share similar attitudes about smoking or vaping?
- If you don't use tobacco and a few of your close friends started smoking or vaping, how would you react?
- This article talks about how the advertising industry preys on teens with poor self-image and low self-esteem. Do you agree or disagree with this view?
- What do you consider to be the biggest influence in how you feel about yourself?

Sometimes it's easier to be positive about our friends than with ourselves. Distribute *Be Your Own Best Friend*. Discuss each point. Ask students to try to remind themselves of these points over the following week, perhaps by posting the sheet in their room. They could keep a journal for the week, in which they make a note of any times they are able to "be their own best friend."



Image Gap

Answer the following questions honestly. There are no right or wrong answers. This is a chance to learn something about yourself.

A. Read the list below. Check the five qualities you most admire in someone your age:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Good grades at school | <input type="checkbox"/> Has money/things |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Good at art, music, and/or dance | <input type="checkbox"/> Attractive to the opposite sex |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cool clothes | <input type="checkbox"/> Popular/lots of friends |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Smart | <input type="checkbox"/> Liked by teachers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mature | <input type="checkbox"/> Caring/sensitive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Good at sports | <input type="checkbox"/> Healthy/strong |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Not afraid of parents/teachers | <input type="checkbox"/> Funny/sense of Humour |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Good-looking | <input type="checkbox"/> Not influenced by what others say/ think |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tough | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

B. Fill in the qualities chosen in Section A in the spaces provided. Circle a rating from 1 to 10 to indicate how much you think that it applies to you.

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1. _____ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
2. _____ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
3. _____ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
4. _____ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
5. _____ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Health, Drug Dependency and Tobacco Control Unit, 1996.



Image Gap: Problems and Strategies

Part A

Choose three qualities that represent an "image gap problem" for you. Think of all the ways you could try to solve each "problem", then decide which is the best strategy.

| Problem | Possible Strategies | Best Strategy |
|-----------|---------------------|---------------|
| I wish... | | |
| I wish... | | |
| I wish... | | |

Part B

Answer these questions truthfully. The first question requires a little more care and thought, so try to spend more time on it.

1. What do you like best about yourself?

2. What did you learn from this exercise?

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Image Gap: What I'm told vs. What I tell myself

Fill in the speech bubbles with “What media tells me” with messages you learned from the lesson and “What I tell myself.” The first ones have been done for you. Please fill in the rest.

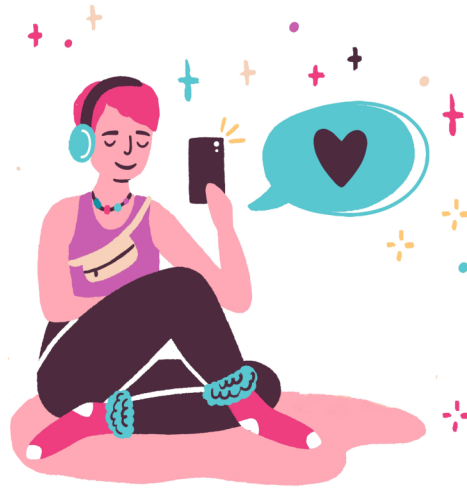
Do you notice a gap between these two thoughts? Why do you think that is? Write your answers on a separate piece of paper.

What media tells me

What I tell myself

I should change
the way I look
and dress

I don't need to
try to be some-
one else



Four empty speech bubbles for writing responses under the 'What media tells me' column.

Four empty speech bubbles for writing responses under the 'What I tell myself' column.

Image Gap: What I'm told vs. What I tell myself

Fill in the speech bubbles with “what media tells me” with messages you learned from the lesson and “what I tell myself”. The first ones have been done for you, please fill in the rest.

Do you notice a gap between these two thoughts? Why do you think that is?

What media tells me

What I tell myself

All the cool kids
vape or smoke

I don't need to do
things just because
they're 'cool'



Tobacco, Self Image and Self Esteem

According to the World Health Organization, self-esteem, self-image and tobacco use are directly linked. Adolescents who smoke tend to have low self-esteem, and low expectations for future achievement. Often they see smoking or vaping as a way to cope with the feelings of stress, anxiety and depression that stem from a lack of self-confidence.

Adolescent girls are more likely to cope with stress by "worrying," and then turn to cigarettes to cope with worry. Adolescents who see tobacco as a way to handle negative feelings are more likely to ignore the long-term health consequences of smoking.

Teen's attitudes towards their friends, classmates, boyfriends and girlfriends who use tobacco can make a difference to their own likelihood of smoking or vaping. Studies have shown that the single most direct influence on tobacco use among young teens is the smoking habits of their five best friends. Girls with a best friend who smokes are nine times likelier to become smokers themselves than those with non-smoking best friends.

Because they are no longer allowed to advertise in many different kinds of media, tobacco companies target teens by paying "influencers" on sites like YouTube, Instagram or TikTok to post picture or videos of themselves. They also take advantage of popular trends like TikTok challenges to get users to make videos with hashtags like "vaping" or "vapetricks." As a result, some teens believe that smoking or vaping will improve their image, by making them appear more mature or "cool." For these teens, smoking or vaping is an attempt to improve the way they're perceived by friends and peers. Studies have shown that if a person's peers do react positively to this strategy, then they are likely to continue smoking.

This attitude is not lost on tobacco advertisers, who portray smoking and vaping as a proof of adulthood, maturity, and popularity. In the case of young girls, using tobacco is also equated with thinness - feeding on teen insecurities about body image. Being slim gives these girls self-confidence, and makes them feel fashionable. Surrounded by a culture that supports such beliefs, some teenage girls may see tobacco as a way to attain these goals.

Sources:

Johnathan Samet and Soon-Young Yoon (eds.), "Women and the Tobacco Epidemic: Challenges for the 21st Century." The World Health Organization, 2001. Pages 55, 57.



Be Your Own Best Friend

Know Yourself

Accept your strengths and your weaknesses.

Everyone has both!

Accept Help

Some problems are too big to solve alone.

Confide in someone you trust, and lighten the load.

Go Gently

Don't be hard on yourself.

Be careful not to expect too much, or to over-react to your mistakes.

Be True to You

Don't try to be someone else. Be proud of who you are.

Pay attention to your own thoughts and feelings, and do what seems right for you.

Control Self-Talk

Listen to the voice inside your head.

If you hear put-downs - "I'm so stupid." "I'm not worth it." "I should be more like him/her." - then STOP!

Take a deep breath, and change the tune to - "Everybody makes mistakes." "I deserve it." "How I am is good enough for me."

Take Time Out

Spend some time alone and enjoy your favourite music, reading a book or magazine; or write in your journal.

Stay Active

When you walk, run, dance and play hard, your body gets rid of nervous energy and tension. And when you feel fit and strong, you're ready to meet life's challenges.

