

THE ROLE MODELS PROJECT

WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT...?

BODY IMAGE

ARTICLES AND ACTIVITIES

Introduction	2	Individuality Is Beautiful – by Imogen	9
Top Tips For Body Image – by Amber	3	Gender Dysphoria: Who's She? – by Vic	11
The Battle Of Finding Yourself – by Ally	5	The Pressures Of Perfection – by Ani	13
Know Who YOU Are! – by Nick	7	Signposting page	15

WHAT IS THE ROLE MODELS PROJECT?

What do we wish we'd known when we were younger

A team of students who are currently studying or recently completed Higher Education courses in Sussex were asked to consider issues particularly relevant to your age group. They started with the question 'What do we wish we'd known about that topic when we were younger?'

In response to this question the team have written articles and made videos that offer ideas, tips and advice on each topic that might be helpful to you right now.

Find out more about the Role Models project:

<https://www.sussexlearningnetwork.org.uk/lisetoolkits/Role-Models-Resource-Books>

WHAT IS THIS BOOKLET?

The Role Models team were asked to consider their relationship with body image. They discussed issues surrounding body image, the pressures they experienced and their approaches to some of the challenges they have faced.

Each article in this booklet offers a personal perspective from one of the team on body image, based on their own experiences. They also offer tips, tasks and practical changes that you might explore to better understand your own body image. At the end of the booklet there are also links to further information and support on the topic.

Each member of the team has approached the topic in their own way. Find an article that interests you.



Watch the short video that accompanies this booklet

The video that accompanies this booklet introduces the Role Models team and offers some of their initial thoughts and strategies to address body image:

<https://www.sussexlearningnetwork.org.uk/lisetoolkits/Role-Models-Resource-Books>

This project is funded by



www.sussexlearningnetwork.org.uk

TOP TIPS FOR BODY IMAGE

I struggled a lot at school with my body image, and because of how much it affected my mental health and behaviour, I feel like my teenage years were pretty non-existent. This is such a shame because I realise now that life can be so much more than my body. And life can be so beautiful, no matter how bad it feels at them time.

Here are some tips for coping with negative body image. I wish I knew these when I was younger, and I hope they can help you out.

1) I like to cover up my mirror. I try to only allow myself to look in a full-length mirror just before I go out. I was surprised at first at how much this helps! It shifts my focus from my body and I forget about it and find that I focus on other more important things which makes me feel a lot happier! You can drape a piece of material over your mirror – scarfs can work well. I have a mini stick-on curtain rail above my mirror with material draped over it.

Maybe keep a tally of how many times you check yourself in the mirror in a day. Do you think this is too much? If so, do you think you would be able to reduce it?



Amber

ZOOLOGY STUDENT
UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

2) When negative thoughts about my body creep in, I ask myself what I look for in a friend or family member. When I think about what makes me love the people that are important to me it never involves their looks. For example, I have a friend that I love because they are uplifting to be around and interesting, funny, kind and supportive. I do not care what they look like, they are beautiful to me because of who they are. So, this makes me think that the people who love me are also unlikely to care what I look like and are more concerned with who I am as a friend.

What do you look for in a friend? Can you apply this to yourself?

3) I have realised that my happiness and health are more important than what other people think. I need both mental and physical health to be able to achieve what I want to in life. I want to spend my life working on animal and environmental conservation and trying to make a real difference. If I let what other people think of me affect my health, I won't be able to do that so well!

Is there anything you love to do that might be affected by worries of what others might think of you?

4) Exercise should be a celebration of moving your body not a punishment! I only do exercise if it is fun and I enjoy it. After years of over exercising to try to change my body I no longer believe exercise should be used to intentionally sculpt my body. Now I like to move my body because it feels good. I love swimming, zumba, dancing and yoga, there are some wonderful dance and yoga workouts online. I only do them when I feel like it, I have no routine around exercise, just when it feels right for my body.

What type of movement do you enjoy? Do you exercise for enjoyment or another reason?

5) I have tapped unfollow on anyone on social media that makes me feel bad about myself or my body. If you are worried about doing this, you can still appear as a follower but mute somebody's posts and stories without them knowing. How to do this differs, depending on the social media platform. But give it a google to get instructions if you would like to try it.

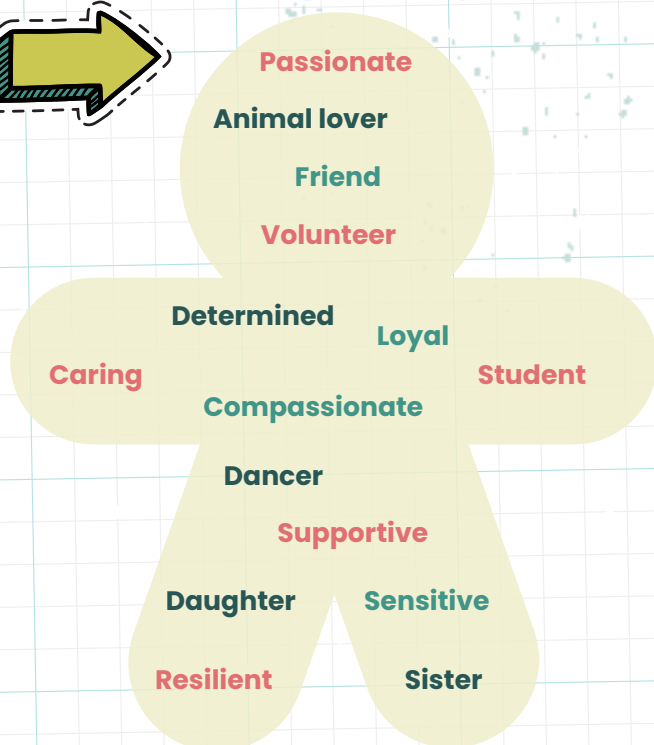
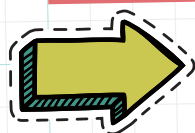
6) Be your own cheerleader! It is a good skill to be able to reassure yourself. This is something I am still working on. But if I can have the confidence to tell myself that my body does not define me, and that I don't need to change anything, then I am less likely to seek this reassurance from others. This is making me feel less dependent on others for reassurance. I am now starting to feel more empowered in taking charge of my feelings about my body, rather than basing my feelings towards myself on outside gratification, or lack of it.

Realising Your Worth Task

Realising that my worth is not defined by my weight or looks has been such an important thing for me. I am worthy, regardless of what I look like, and so are you! So, here is a task to show that.

Fill in the template with all of the things that make you who you are that are nothing to do with looks. I have put mine here as an example:

AMBER'S EXAMPLE



For this task:

A pen or pencil
15 mins +

THE BATTLE OF FINDING YOURSELF



Ally

MUSIC PERFORMANCE STUDENT
GREATER BRIGHTON
METROPOLITAN COLLEGE

The road ahead of us can seem like a long one... But it's important to look back at the road we've just come from and see how far we've travelled.

My journey has been a rocky one: one that took so many twists and turns but led me to where I am at this moment in time. I was frightened - I didn't face easy situations, but I look back now and feel high amounts of pride for what I did.

A recent battle that I overcame was the battle of my identity. From engaging within the LGBTQIA+ online community, I finally accepted myself as a transgender male.

To explain this a little, my life has been full of me feeling high amounts of dysphoria surrounding my body. And the image that people saw of me was never me. I had been born into a female body.

As I grew up, I realised something about me was different. From a young age, I never felt comfortable with the way I looked, there was also something niggling at me that I didn't understand. I typically grew up to be a 'tomboy' and didn't fit into societal expectations of what a 'girl' should look like. I didn't have the greatest reactions from peers when I was younger, in fact it lasted until the time I joined college.

These things can really have an impact on how you view yourself; it's so easy to get caught up in your thoughts that your body is wrong and whilst you can't even begin to love

yourself, you have no idea how anybody could ever love or accept you. It can be a really toxic mindset to be in and feels impossible to escape.

But it is possible.

Finally, I found myself in a position where I began to care less of what other people think of me and care more about who I really am. Since that, I have experienced so much more confidence and happiness - I never thought this to be achievable for me.

I realise that the journey you're on now will most likely not be the journey you'll be on in five years' time. You have time to change things, you have time to see yourself differently. The image that you may have of yourself at this moment in time can change, even if it feels like the most impossible thing. Society has so many high expectations that aren't realistic and this is a reminder that you don't have to live up to anybody's expectations.

We are our worst enemies. Reflect on the past, how much have you changed in the last five years alone? We never stop growing.

My past has been full of a lot of struggles with identifying differently to everyone else. It was also full of a lot of mental health challenges and obstacles that I never thought I could overcome. Fast forward to today and I am living proof that it's possible to overcome even what feels like the most impossible situations.

WORDS OF THE FUTURE TASK

I encourage you to write a letter to yourself. Either use your past self or write to your future self. Talk about how you see yourself and who you want to grow into. Or perhaps tell your younger self about the journey you've had to face. It's about reflection – this is just for you and shouldn't involve anyone else's opinion.

For this task:

A pen or pencil, paper
15 mins +

Dear young Ally,

It's your future self, sending you a letter of advice.

That's right, you're called Ally now!

Anyway, I wanted to tell you that things really will get better as you get older and gain more experience of life.

The future holds so much potential for you and you are going to strive and work so hard to find your inner happiness. I'm so proud of you for sticking around on this earth and for pushing through every tough situation that you have faced. It's worth it in the end.

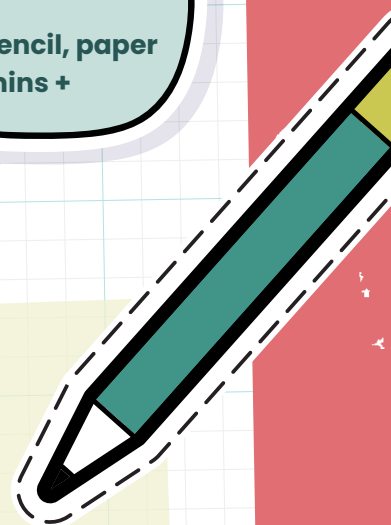
You have become a living being who has dealt with so much pain and trauma yet still managed to accomplish some of the craziest life goals, even by the age of just 19. Not to mention, you started your whole new journey on becoming... you.

I advise you to not give up, even when times get seriously hard. I also advise you to stop listening to negativity that others have towards you - they couldn't be more wrong and you'll see why.

Look in the mirror less and choose to look into yourself more - you'll be thankful to spend more time listening to how you feel and who you really want to be.

See you in the future,

Older Ally



KNOW WHO YOU ARE!

At school I was very much not the cool kid, nor the brainy kid or the sportsman. I tried to join the basketball team, but was denied – probably because I didn't exactly fit the typical athlete image and... well I showed absolutely no interest in PE lessons!

I was very insecure about my image and position within the structure of 'school life' and was bullied from day one up until I left secondary school. That is when things really began to change. After I left school I went onto college and that's when my journey began. It was a chance for me to 're-write the book'. I was going somewhere where no one knew me. A fresh start. And in college I grew a lot and I was gradually becoming happy in my own skin and feeling confident.

After college I was looking for more. I felt confident about myself, but still wanted to push my limits and so started to look for the next challenge. I had been doing Martial Arts since I was 7 years old and was introduced to my now Aikido teacher who was running a course in Kyoto, Japan. Seeming impossible and a little scary I made a plan and stuck to it. I completed the course twice and taught on it. I have taught with my instructor and on my own all over the world.

We need to stop looking at others to decide on what we should look like or who we should be. Instead go on an adventure, see the world, see other cultures, talk to as many people as you can and learn and embrace as much as you can.

Nick

COMMUNICATION DESIGN
STUDENT, GREATER BRIGHTON
METROPOLITAN COLLEGE



You are you now! Whatever stage of your journey you are at, you should be proud of yourself, but trust in yourself to go and get what you want, what you desire and dream of and don't let anyone get in your way.

I'm not saying that you will stop wanting to look like someone else or have the life of someone else. But what I have found is that for me it's not so much about how my body looks but how it serves me and I serve it. Take care of it. Stretch, keep good posture, exercise, stay hydrated and most of all eat good nutritional food.

You never know – do these things, challenge yourself constantly but make sure you have fun too and you might well become the person that others aspire to be. You might be reading this and think, cool nice story, but that won't happen to me. Things like that don't happen to me. Well why not? I'm telling you they can all it takes is a goal, a dream, an Idea and then you, yes you, CAN do it. **Let's make it happen...**



PLAN YOUR OWN ADVENTURE TASK

1

In Box A, list all the goals or experiences you'd like to have in your future.

- It can be anything – just make sure it's what YOU want to do and don't forget to be ambitious.
- If it seems crazy and impossible, PERFECT. Let's do it! Let's make it possible.

A: List of goals I'd like to achieve in the future:

2

Now, think about an order that you could do all these things in. Write numbers next to each idea in the list to show the order. Consider how much time each takes and what preparation is needed – this will need researching.

3

Take the first thing that you want to do from your list and write it in the centre of box B

4

Create a mind map around it of things you need to do or have to do to achieve it.

- For example, how much money will you need or what specific qualifications do you require?
- Go into lots of detail and see if you can track back until you arrive at the place you are now, so you know what you need to be doing tomorrow to make this really happen.

B: Mind Map – What do you need to do to achieve your first goal?

For this task:

A pen or pencil
30 mins +

5

Now take the information you wrote in box B and turn it into a list. Write it in the order you need to do each thing to reach your goal.

C: Goal

Steps to achieve it:

BOOM...look what you did, you have already started your adventure. You now have a step by step guide to achieving your goal. Now you just have to do each task step by step. You can do it!

Example of my step by step list from my trip:

C: Goal

Get visa

Steps to achieve it:

1. Research passport renewal
2. Save passport fee
3. Passport renewal application
4. Apply for course
5. Course screening
6. Acceptance onto course
7. Recieve passport
8. Book flight
9. Visa application
10. Review and interview

Remember, all the time you waste worrying about what other people think of you, is wasted time that you could have been thinking about yourself. Take that first step and gather momentum! You can do it.

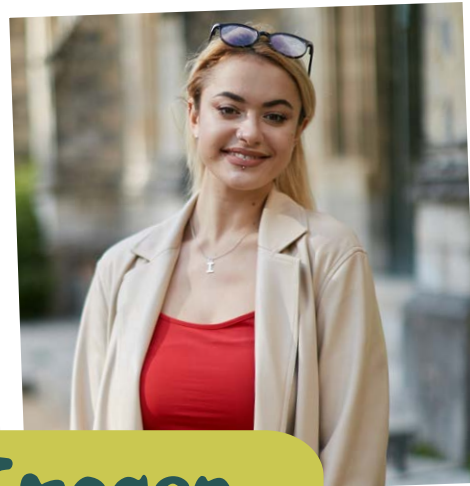
INDIVIDUALITY IS BEAUTIFUL

Ever find yourself scrolling through Instagram or watching TV, and seeing someone with big muscles or a slim waist, and instantly start putting yourself down and comparing your own body to theirs?

I know I do, and very regularly for that matter. We live in a generation where so many people's lives are broadcasted online for us all to see, and although social media and technology are brilliant things, this makes it very easy for us to compare our lives to the ones we see online. Boys with six packs posting their latest gym selfie, girls posing by the pool with curves in all the 'right' places...

Why is it that so many of us are unable to appreciate someone else's beauty, without putting ourselves down?

Although it plays a big part, social media is not just where this happens. It's so easy for me to compare myself to my friends, my family, even total strangers. After looking at everyone else, I start looking at my own body and begin to put myself down: my nose is too big, my waistlines too wide, my teeth aren't white enough, my hair isn't long enough, maybe I should think about getting lip fillers?



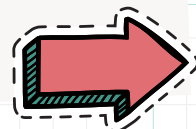
Imogen

ACTING FOR FILM STUDENT
UNIVERSITY OF CHICHESTER

Personally, I've struggled on and off with my body image throughout the years. In 2019 I was at rock bottom regarding my body and how I viewed myself. My confidence was at an all-time low, which now looking back, I realised stopped me from doing things, making memories and being my happiest self. Since then, I'm now at a weight I feel a lot happier with and my confidence has absolutely grown. But even now, when I look in the mirror, I still sometimes see myself as I was when I wasn't happy with my body. No matter how my body has physically changed, I can still find myself not liking what I see.

I'm here to tell you that this is completely normal. It's human instinct to long for what other people have, and put ourselves down in the process. However, wouldn't life just be so much more peaceful if we were able to accept and love what we do already have?

This, I know, is easier said than done...but that's why I'm here! I'm here to be the big sister, friend and angel on your shoulder, that's going to tell you why you should love yourself - just the way you are.



Whenever I feel down about myself, I remind myself that nobody else on this planet is the same as me. We are all completely unique as individuals. Sure, we can have similar traits to others, but you are the only you. Does that make sense? Although it sounds clichéd (I can see you rolling your eyes!), everyone is beautiful in their own way. Why try to be someone else, when you can be the best version of you?

What I'm trying to say is, self-love does not depend on your physical appearance. Self-love is accepting who you are and loving it.

Life is short, so don't spend it criticising the one thing that gets you up in the morning, and lets you live and breathe every day. When you're old and wrinkly, what will it matter what you look like? The only thing that'll matter, is how you lived your life. So make sure live it to its fullest!

TOP 5 TASK

- To help you see just how great you are, I'd like you to write a list of physical aspects you like about yourself and why.
- And I know, this can be hard for some people. Sometimes you just can't see how amazing you truly are because that voice in your head is telling you otherwise.
- To help give you an idea of what you could write about, I'll share my list with you:

Get the idea? Things we love about ourselves don't have to just be what society tells us is 'attractive', but things that allow us to live our lives every day that we're thankful for. This is personal to you, nobody has to see it so write whatever you wish.

You got this!
Imogen

For this task:

**A pen or pencil
15 mins +**

MY TOP 5:

- 1 I love the gap in my front teeth because it's different and makes me feel unique.
- 2 I love my stretch marks because they remind me that my body is changing all the time - and that's really quite special.
- 3 I love my legs because they allow me to go for walks on a nice day.
- 4 I love my eyes because they allow me to wake up and see the world every day.
- 5 I love my fingers because I can do this strange trick with them that freaks people out. (It never gets old!)

MY TOP 5:

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

GENDER DYSPHORIA: WHO'S SHE

I want to share my story of having to create my own type of normal over the years. Dealing with gender dysphoria and growing up in a world where that term didn't exist. Gender wasn't a spectrum and not following the roles you were assigned at birth meant being an easy target for all sorts to mess with.

I can remember from a young age all the arguments with family members and tantrums I would throw because I wanted to wear my jeans instead of that blue dress with yellow flowers on it. I didn't yet know why it hurt me so much to put these clothes on. And growing up in a Caribbean Christian household, little six-year-old me prayed, "Dear God, please make a boy instead". But that's not how it works.

Cut to high school, where girls were allowed to wear trousers instead of skirts all the time. I was like a pig in mud! But of course high school also comes with its own hardship. When you absorb negative energy from others, it can make you mean too; not just to yourself, but to others as well. I had to know when to defend myself and when to stay quiet and just act like I didn't exist. It felt lonely not having someone to talk to about this, let alone someone to relate to.

A portrait of a young woman with dark hair pulled back, wearing glasses and a dark green top. She is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile.

Vic

**DIGITAL MEDIA DESIGN STUDENT
EAST SUSSEX COLLEGE GROUP**

When I finally moved to England at sixteen, I was still a bit secluded. But this time to myself allowed me to finally try new styles. What I think a lot of folks don't get with a trans person is, or at least in my experience, I wasn't allowed much freedom to explore my masculinity and I was often shamed. So, when I was finally able to, I went all out. I didn't want a thing to do with anything even remotely feminine. Then something finally clicked in my head...

It's just fabric. It didn't change my personality or how much I do for those I care about. And it certainly didn't take away from my masculinity. A simple thing like nail polish doesn't make me a girl, I'm just having fun trying to get through this life just like everyone else.

Then I met some really good friends who didn't care what I wore or how I wore it. After a while I just started living because I finally accepted something I have been trying my whole life to ignore. I'm not trying to sugar coat things, because I know I still got a whole heap of rough days ahead, but it's the little moments of bliss that keeps me going.

I'm finally realising who I am, doing what I love and being around people who love me back without trying to change me to fit their narrative.

HERE'S SOME TIPS THAT I FOUND WORKED FOR ME:

- Learn your worth for yourself – that might not make sense to someone struggling to figure themselves out. You're only going to figure that out by getting out of your comfort zone a little bit. I know it's scary but so far, it's how I have managed to cope with my anxieties a little bit. I didn't know how much I could really achieve until I made the plunge to get back into education. Yes, I still have my struggles. But I feel a lot more confident having learnt what I can bring to the table.

- Stand up for yourself – It's okay to say when something makes you feel uncomfortable. Even if you don't know specifically why. And it's also okay to make sure you are heard. Just be as calm and respectful as you can, even if they are not. It can be quite disarming!
- Don't go it alone – There is someone out there is going to genuinely love you for you and that means 'flaws and all'. You just might not have met them yet. If someone is trying to change who you are, to make life easier for them, then they ain't a real friend. It's hard to find that middle ground and sometimes you just have to let them go.

AND LASTLY,

- Step outside of yourself – If you knew a close friend that was struggling with their body image, what are three little bits of advice you would offer to help them?

Top Advice Task

What is the best three bits of advice you would a friend struggling with their body image? Write it in the box below:

For this task:

A pen or pencil
10mins +

Tip

Swap tips with your friends and if it's helpful, write them somewhere that will help remind you when things are challenging.

Do you follow this advice yourself? if not, why not?! What can you do to be kind to yourself and improve your own body image?

THE PRESSURES OF PERFECTION



Ani

INTERNATIONAL
BUSINESS STUDENT
UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

Body image is a worry that everyone has – whether it is models or celebrities or even people like myself. Have you ever had that moment where you’ve seen an image on social media that might be highly edited and then compare it to your own body?

I have my own battle with body image as I suffer from vitiligo. Some of you may not know what that is. Vitiligo is caused by the lack of a pigment called melanin in the skin. This causes white patches to develop on your skin or hair. I’ve had vitiligo since the day I was born. And strangely, my vitiligo works according to stress. So, when I’m more stressed, the more patches appear on my skin. As a young child, I always felt self-conscious because it made me feel different to other kids.

But then it became more recognised among society when model, Winnie Harlow, began openly showing her vitiligo in magazines and fashion shows. Or when Gillette Venus ran a campaign about being comfortable in your own skin and a person with vitiligo was among the campaigners. Immediately, my sister showed me, and I felt so good to say, ‘That person is like me’.

This moment for me was really key as this is when I stopped getting asked questions all the time about what skin condition I had. Having vitiligo would really affect my body image throughout my formative teenage

years as I would get asked questions like, ‘Is it contagious?’. Then, the moment Winnie Harlow came around, I felt more willing to not cover it up always and be able to show the real me. I know the ‘real me’ sounds really clichéd but that was a defining moment where I felt indifferent to everyone else.

For me, an important part of understanding my own body image was exposing and teaching others about it. So, when people would ask me certain things that I may not feel comfortable with, I would explain it to them as I believe that exposure is key. In my case, once I had exposed my family and friends to vitiligo, they were more understanding and were even able to share their knowledge with others. If anything, I felt more open to not wearing makeup and covering up the patches than ever.

And yes, there were times I would feel upset when people would ask me about it because it pointed out my differences to others. But I then realised that people were simply asking out of curiosity. I know it is hard to come to terms with explaining something you may not feel comfortable with about yourself. But I found one of the best ways for me to gain confidence was talking more and more about it and realising that it made me ‘me’ and that everyone is different and has their own views of what the perfection is.

Find your own Role Model task



TIP

This is a great exercise. When I was doing my own research for this article, I was able to find others that I can identify with.

If you can, watch this short video. It's about covering up vitiligo and it was made by BBC Three for a series called 'MisFITS Like Us'.

The series was released in 2018, which was my formative teenage years. It really resonated with me as it taught me that people will ask questions and it is about being calm, gentle, and explaining your insecurity with confidence:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6sEF5vQ7gB0>

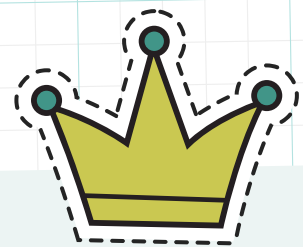
NOTE DOWN ANY KEY WEBSITES, VIDEOS, OR ROLE MODELS YOU FIND BELOW THAT YOU MAY WANT TO REFER TO AGAIN IN THE FUTURE:

For this task:

A pen or pencil
Internet access
30mins +

After watching the video, I would like you to research a body image role model of your own.

This could be someone who has a similar physicality to you or someone whose style or attitude you find inspiring.



SIGNPOSTING

Some recommendations of further information from the team.

Articles

Social Media and body image

<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20190311-how-social-media-affects-body-image>

Tips to use social media to boost self-esteem

<https://www.insider.com/how-social-media-affects-body-image>

Why don't men talk about body image?

<https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/lifestyle/article/body-image-men-suffer-too>

One in three UK teenagers 'ashamed of their body'

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/may/15/one-in-three-uk-teenagers-ashamed-of-their-body>

What Does It Mean to Be Genderqueer or Have a Nonbinary Gender?

<https://www.verywellmind.com/what-does-it-mean-to-be-genderqueer-or-non-binary-4140578>

Websites/Dedicated pages

BBC Body Image site

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/tags/zjs9c-qt/body-image/1>

Young Minds Body Image site

<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/feelings-and-symptoms/body-image/>

The Vitiligo Society

<https://vitigosociety.org/>

Videos

Male body image

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M49vu-0C9Euk>

Ted Talk – Body image and social media

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iW-c5rQ_YvYw

Three things not to say – playlist

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL64ScZt2I7wGxZIXAu0r0UPqpvzF-23mgc>

Impact of body image on young people

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QuDjO-Jqi0T8>

Confronting Comments On Vitiligo

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6sE-F5vQ7gB0>

My Skin, My Way – Gillette Venus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-NU2QHhvaB4>

Instagram/facebook

@jameelajami

@sundaymorningview

@bodyimagepositive

Body Positive Instagram account recommendations

- <https://www.cosmopolitan.com/health-fitness/g13352390/body-positivity-instagram-accounts/>
- <https://www.insider.com/body-positive-instagram-accounts-to-follow-in-2019-2018-12#33-radhikasanghani-4088-followers-1>

Places to get help

- <https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/feelings-and-symptoms/body-image/#where-to-get-help>
- <https://www.berealcampaign.co.uk/resources/support-advice>
- <https://eating-disorders.org.uk/information/body-image/>

This resource was created in 2021.

THE TEAM BEHIND THIS BOOKLET STUDIED AT THE FOLLOWING INSTITUTIONS:

East Sussex College Group | www.escg.ac.uk

Greater Brighton Metropolitan College | www.gbmc.ac.uk

University of Chichester | www.chi.ac.uk

University of Sussex | www.sussex.ac.uk

For more information about the Role Models projects including links to our Role Models films and other topic booklets visit

<https://www.sussexlearningnetwork.org.uk/lisetoolkits/Role-Models-Resource-Books>

Thanks for supporting the Role Models Project.