



Body Image Guidelines

These Body Image Guidelines are an extension of the GV Personal Wellbeing Policy, and represent guiding principles that GV will promote within the gymnastics community. They are not steadfast rules that GV expect clubs to adopt. They are values that, in conjunction with education and awareness, GV expect Clubs will utilise.

Body image disorders are a societal problem and are not unique to gymnastics. They include eating related disorders such as Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia Nervosa, Binge Eating Disorder and Obesity, and non-eating related disorders such as steroid use and exercise dependence (excessive musculature).

Coaches, judges, and administrative staff have a vital role to play in addressing body image issues within our gymnastics community. These people are in an ideal position to identify and respond to people at risk of developing, or who have developed, body image disorders.

Identification

If a person's life is adversely affected by their eating behaviours, level of exercise or body image concerns, then that person has a serious health issue that deserves treatment.

Eating disorders range from near normal healthy eating, through an array of disordered eating behaviours, to clinically diagnosable eating disorders (as shown below).



<p>Normal Natural Eating</p> <p>The person eats in response to hunger and satisfaction most of the time and is accepting of body shape and size.</p>	<p>Non Clinical Eating Disorder</p> <p>The person counts calories, skips meals or food groups, eats from lists of 'good' and 'bad' foods, follows a diet program or a magazine diet for a period of time.</p>	<p>Sub Clinical Eating Disorder</p> <p>The person occasionally binges or purges, takes diet pills, feels disgusted/preoccupied about body and/or behaviours, goes for extended periods without eating much or feels some loss of control around food.</p>	<p>Clinical Eating Disorder</p> <p>Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia Nervosa, Binge Eating Disorder, Clinical Obesity and others.</p>
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Some indications of a possible body image issue:

- ☞ Constantly talking about food
- ☞ Comparing body shapes
- ☞ Excessive weight fluctuations
- ☞ Wanting to wear baggy clothes during training
- ☞ Excessively checking appearance in mirrors
- ☞ Excessively training
- ☞ Preferring training to friends, work or school
- ☞ Rapidly increasing muscle size and strength
- ☞ Increasing health problems, such as injuries (bone fractures, sprains, soreness).



Intervention

When you recognise that a person may have a body image problem, it is difficult to know how and when to approach the person and/or their parents with your concerns. It is important to raise your concerns, and to encourage the person to seek professional diagnosis and treatment as soon as possible.

Here are some strategies to use when raising the issue of body image:

- ⊗ Consider who should approach the person you are concerned about. For example: If an administrator notices a possible issue with an athlete, they may refer the issue to the athlete's coach if the coach has a closer relationship with the athlete.
- ⊗ Check for guidance in relevant workplace policies and procedures.
- ⊗ Consider the time and place. Approach in a non-threatening and unobtrusive way. For example: Ask to have a chat with the athlete in a non-threatening environment away from others.
- ⊗ Don't widely discuss your concerns with others. Talk to the person of your concern.
- ⊗ Plan what you will say and how you will say it.
- ⊗ Don't tell the person to "get over it". Don't threaten to keep checking on him/her.
- ⊗ Don't try and convince the person they are "not fat" or that particular "foods won't make them fat". Body image disorders are not logical; you won't win any arguments with them.
- ⊗ Be prepared for both positive and or negative emotional responses.
- ⊗ Have information ready to hand over. For example: Brochures, contact numbers, support groups. Do your research first.

Support

Although you may not be directly involved in treatment or even post treatment care of a person with a body image issue, you can still play an important, although indirect, role. There are a number of things that you can do that can have a positive impact on the person that you are concerned about.

You may support individuals who are working with a person with a body image issue. These individuals need to be able to talk about their feelings and stressors to an understanding, sympathetic and supportive friend, colleague or medical expert. You should:

- ⊗ Ensure that you respect confidentiality and privacy, and maintain and enforce trust
- ⊗ Check for guidance in relevant workplace policies and procedures

You may support a person with a body image issue. You should:

- ⊗ Provide understanding and reassurance
- ⊗ Convince the person you that you are not disappointed with them
- ⊗ Develop honest, open communication while maintaining a non-judgemental attitude
- ⊗ Talk about vocational interests, relationships etc. rather than body image issues
- ⊗ Enhance the person's ability to seek the support that will assist them with recovery
 - Help them research resources
 - Attend meetings with them for support if they require
 - Be available to talk about the recovery process with them.

You should also look after yourself:

- ⊗ Show acceptance of yourself, even if you feel some guilt, for example, over how much pressure you put on the person or how much you push them.



⊗ Look for signs that you may be over involved. These may include:

- Feeling individually responsible for assisting. For example: “If I don’t help, no one else will”
- Believe that you have all the answers. For example: Intervening with medical advice
- You feel hopeless because you are unable to solve the person’s problems.

Preventing body image issues

Prevention aims to reduce the incidence of body image issues by targeting risk and protective factors. Prevention is the key to reducing body image issues, particularly in athletes. Coaches, judges and administrative staff are in a unique position to initiate and maintain prevention efforts due to the sustained relationships they develop with their athletes. For some people the Club environment may be the only place they feel safe.

You can reduce the risk of body image issues by being alert to:

- ⊗ Bullying
- ⊗ Teasing
- ⊗ Discrimination
- ⊗ An unhealthy focus on weight, low fat foods, dieting, use of dietary aids, muscle bulk
- ⊗ Regular weighing of athletes

You can help protect people at your Club by ensuring that:

- ⊗ Everyone feels “connected” to the Club and feels that they “fit in”
- ⊗ Everyone has opportunities and rewards for involvement
- ⊗ Everyone feels respected
- ⊗ Coaches give constructive criticism rather than only negative comments
- ⊗ Everyone is involved in goal setting and planning
- ⊗ Coaches and athletes jointly set realistic performance goals
- ⊗ Coaches complete each training session with positive feedback and achievements
- ⊗ Encouraging activity for all body shapes and skill levels

Conclusion

Remember that body image issues are a societal problem and not yours alone or even gymnastics alone. This document is to assist you in recognising body image issues and to encourage you to seek support and additional help.

GV acknowledges the support of Eating Disorders Victoria and thank them their assistance and for the use of their excellent Resource for Coaches.

Resources and useful contacts:

Eating Disorders Resource for Coaches from Eating Disorders Foundation of Victoria (EDFV)

1513 High Street Glen Iris Victoria 3146

Ph: 03) 68850318 /1300 550 236

Email edfv@eatingdisorders.org.au Web www.eatingdisorders.org.au

Victorian Centre of Excellence in Eating Disorders (CEED)

Email ceed@mh.org.au Web www.ceed.org.au



Nutrition Australia

www.nutritionaustralia.org/

Alcohol and Drug Information Service

Ph: 08) 94425000/1800 198 024

Web <http://www.drugaware.org.au/>

Help can also be found from

- Private and public hospitals and clinics
- Community mental health services
- Community and women's health services
- General practitioners and other relevant professionals

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