True to Me

Youth group activities for body confidence

Leader Guide

Dove
self-esteem
project

True to Me Leader Guide

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And the experts advising the Dove Self-Esteem Project for helping develop this resource.

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Welcome to the Dove Self-Esteem Projects *True to Me* Leader Guide.. It will help you feel confident leading the programme and ensure that you and your group get the most out of *True to Me* and enjoy the activities. Please share this guide with any adults who will be helping you deliver *True to Me*.

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Introduction

All around the world, girls and young women are struggling with low self-esteem and body confidence because they feel under pressure to be beautiful. They lack body confidence because they are trying to live up to the narrow and unrealistic appearance ideals they see in popular culture and hear their friends and family talk about.

Global research shows that low body confidence holds young people back from reaching their full potential, with more than 80% of girls avoiding activities they love because they don't feel good about the way they look[1]. This includes things like getting involved in classroom debates, trying out for a sports club and in some cases, even just turning up to school.

The Dove Self-Esteem Project's *True to Me* programme is expertly designed to help you to support your group to become more body confident, so they can overcome these pressures and get the most out of life.

True to Me is based on world-leading research in body confidence, showing that 6 out of every 10 girls who take part in this type of programme have better body confidence at least three years later[2]. Feedback from thousands of girls around the world has also shown that they are excited to talk and learn about body confidence. We hope you have fun and make an impact facilitating *True to Me* with your group.

Why Body Confidence?

When we have body confidence, we are satisfied with how our bodies look and with what they can do. People with body confidence generally don't worry about how their bodies look. They are too busy using their bodies for things that make them happy, like being with friends or taking part in activities they enjoy, like sports. Body confidence is also linked to high self-esteem. Girls who are body confident have better relationships with their friends and family, are more confident in different environments like school or work, and more prepared to try new things.

But girls with low body confidence worry a lot about what they look like. They spend a great deal of time, energy, money and emotion on their appearance. Low body confidence can lead to them shying away from friendships and relationships, holding back from speaking in front of people and stopping doing things they love such as swimming or dancing or wearing their favourite clothes. It can even stop them taking part in essential life activities where other people will see them, like school, work or even a doctor's appointment. It stops them standing up for themselves. Low body confidence stops girls becoming confident members of their communities, and gets in the way of their dreams.

Adapation for use with boys

True to Me works best for girls, but is fun and will make a difference for mixed groups, too. See page 10 for tips on how to make True to Me work for your group.

[1] The Dove Global Beauty and Confidence Report - 2016
[2] Stice, Marti, Spoor & Shaw, 2008

A Global Issue

Low body confidence and appearance-related anxiety are global issues. Despite an amazing diversity in looks and cultures around the world, many girls feel unsure about their bodies and lack body confidence. Increasing globalisation means that there is less diversity in beauty standards around the world today now, and technologies such as airbrushing and social media promote ever-more impossible – and universal – appearance ideals.

True to Me empowers girls to recognise and challenge these global beauty pressures and become more body confident. Increased body confidence helps girls to take control of their lives and take advantage of the opportunities available to them. So by running *True to Me* with your group, you are making a real difference to girls' lives.

About the Dove Self-Esteem Project

Dove is a leading personal care brand with a long-standing commitment to improving the body confidence and self-esteem of women and girls. We believe beauty should be a source of confidence, not anxiety, for everyone. Which is why we launched the Dove Self-Esteem Project in 2004 – to make real change in the way girls perceive and embrace beauty, so they can be free of appearance-related anxiety and grow up into body confident women. The project has carried out extensive research into self-esteem and we've already reached millions of young people with our self-esteem education. We are now the largest provider of body confidence education in the world.

The Dove brand always uses real women in its advertising and doesn't alter the shape or natural beauty of our women in post-production. We believe that beauty should be for everyone, because looking and feeling your best makes you feel happier.

How True to Me works

The challenge: the appearance ideal

Every day, girls are sent the message that if they want to be beautiful and successful they need to look a certain way – the 'ideal' way. An ideal is an idea of something that's perfect, but it normally only exists in the imagination. And although the specific way society defines the 'appearance ideal' varies around the world (e.g. in some countries the ideal for girls is tanned, thin, toned and busty; while in others it is petite with fair skin), globally girls and women as well as boys and men feel a strong pressure from media, friends and family to try to achieve it. Our global research has shown that girls are more likely to experience low body confidence if they 'buy into' the appearance ideal.

The solution: speaking out!

True to Me uses fun participatory activities to boost body confidence by applying a well-known psychological principle called cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance is something that happens in our brains when we act in a way that doesn't actually match our beliefs. When we say and do the opposite of what we actually believe, our brain changes our attitudes to match our actions!

Research has found that simply by speaking out for a healthier perspective in front of others, we convince ourselves – as well as others – to follow a healthier perspective. So, if a girl believes in the appearance ideal (even subconsciously, because of pressure from the media and through family and peer groups) but argues against it, such as by speaking out to others about why the appearance ideal is a bad idea, her own beliefs about the appearance ideal will change to match what she is advocating.

True to Me empowers girls to recognise the appearance ideal for themselves and then make a stand against it, creating their own solutions to help them and their friends challenge and resist the ideal. Feeling free of the pressure to look like the appearance ideal lets girls appreciate the bodies they have, and value them for what they can do. This can inspire girls to take better care of themselves, and make choices to eat well and exercise because it makes them feel good, not to fit in.

The more times a girl acts against the appearance ideal by speaking out to others, writing down challenges to the ideal and acting to convince others not to chase the ideal, the more she will reject the appearance ideal and her body confidence will grow. And it's a change that lasts. Studies have even shown that arguing against the appearance ideal changes how young girls' brains respond to media images that promote an unrealistic appearance idea[3].

[3] Stice, Becker, & Yokum, 2013

True to Me is based on the world's leading body acceptance programme. Research shows that three years after participating in activities like the ones in *True to Me*…

- 60% of girls have significantly improved body confidence
- 78% of girls feel more confident and capable at school
- 71% of girls have better relationships with their peers, and
- 53% of girls get on better with their families[2]

[2] Stice, Marti, Spoor, Presnell & Shaw, 2008

Body confidence isn't an isolated issue. Choosing to deliver *True to Me* to your group can make a big difference to their personal development as a whole. Instead of just learning about the issue, girls will experience a change in their perspective and beliefs that will have a hugely positive impact on their lives.

True to Me at a glance

True to Me is a unique programme that doesn't just educate girls about body confidence, it actually has a real and lasting impact on how they feel about themselves. It's also fun! Using a participatory approach, *True to Me* is empowering for girls because they take the lead in the activities and create their own challenges to what society tells them is attractive and valuable.

Who is it for?

True to Me works best with groups of girls aged 11-17. Girls tend to feel more comfortable taking part in girl-only groups, but if your group covers a different age range and/or includes boys, see page 10 for some tips on adapting the programme. It's important to know that boys also have body confidence concerns that this programme can help overcome.

How long does it take?

True to Me is made up of five sessions of 50 minutes each, plus up to three personal challenges for girls to complete between sessions.

- 50 minutes is the **minimum** time needed to deliver each session; try to stay on track with activities because running out of time might mean missing an essential learning step. If you have more time for each session, spend longer on the discussions and give girls more chances to reflect and speak out against the appearance ideal.

How do we set up the group?

True to Me works best when girls work through the activities in small groups. A ratio of one leader to eight girls is best for the whole programme, and there are some activities where girls will work in even smaller groups. The more each girl gets to speak out against the appearance ideal, the more her body confidence will improve.

What do we need?

Not much! Pens and paper are needed in most sessions, access to a computer and a wider range of creative materials are useful at certain points, if available, but not essential. Some activities offer handouts to make it easier to prepare, but all these are simple and could just be copied out in the session if printing facilities aren't available. If you want to adapt the activities to use more technology and creative approaches, please do so.

How do we prepare?

Take about **two hours** to read through this Leader Guide and the full programme, and involve all the leaders you'll be working with so they understand how *True to Me* works. There are some links to further research on page 15 if you want to extend your knowledge. Each activity contains all the information you need to run it, including support prompts that give an example of what you could say to trigger the key learning outcomes (see page 9).

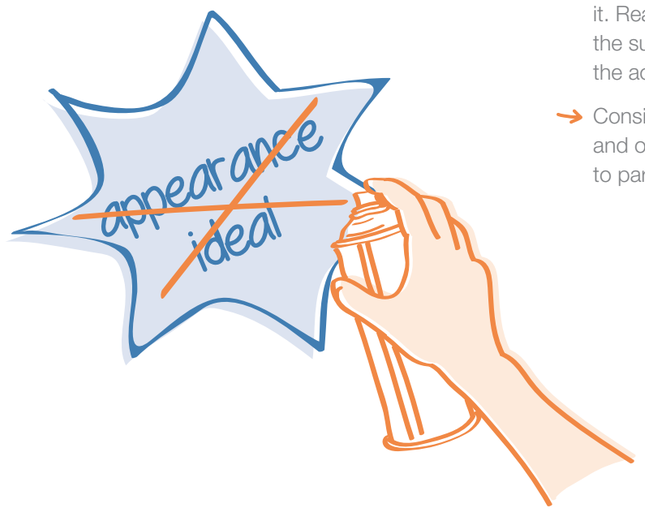
Look out for the support prompts! These sentences in orange are there as examples of things you could say at important stages of the activities, like verbal signposts. Feel free to put them into your own words.

Why not organise a leader session to talk through the programme in advance, and continue to make space between sessions to talk about how it's going?

What outcomes should we look for?

True to Me works by taking girls through five experiences:

1. Girls **define the appearance ideal** for themselves and connect it to their own experiences. They recognise that it's narrowly defined, often contradictory and impossible to achieve naturally.
2. Girls **explore the costs of chasing the appearance ideal** and the negative impact it has on individuals and society as a whole. They recognise it's not worth chasing the appearance ideal.
3. Girls **challenge the appearance** ideal by coming up with verbal and written arguments against chasing the ideal, and share these with their friends. They recognise how changing what they say and do can improve their body confidence.
4. Girls **celebrate their positive characteristics,** such as what they can do with their bodies, their personalities, attitudes and character strengths as well as the things they like about their appearance. They recognise the importance of reflecting on, and sharing, what they appreciate about themselves.
5. Girls **reflect on how to best respond to future pressures** they might face to meet the appearance ideal. They recognise that they have the tools and ideas they need to face these situations positively and with body confidence.



Can we adapt the activities?

The activities in this guide have been tested and refined with thousands of girls over the past 20 years. We recommend following the programme as it's written wherever possible. You know your group best, and have the expertise to recognise what will work best for them. If you do make any adaptations, there are a few golden rules:

- Stay true to the context of the activity, so the learning outcome is the same. Use the 'why this matters' box to guide you.
- It's important that girls do not talk about the benefits of chasing the appearance ideal or degenerate into talking about which models/ actresses are the most beautiful, as this will reduce the impact of the programme.
- Don't skip the opportunities to discuss and reflect. For girls to build their body confidence, they need to verbally challenge the appearance ideal as much as possible.
- Take a look at the adaptation ideas we've included in the 'do it differently' box.
- Reflect on your group's level of maturity and how your experience suggests they will respond to the activities.
- Walk girls through the same process to develop ideas, recognise the ideal and speak out against it. Read each activity carefully, particularly looking at the support prompts, to understand the process of the activity before you adapt it.
- Consider the different learning needs in your group and offer girls extra support if they need it in order to participate fully.

True to Me at a glance - continued

What about other genders?

Because girls taking part in *True to Me* define the appearance ideal for themselves and then use their definition in all the activities that follow, *True to Me* can adapt to any cultural or social context. The same is true for boys. To make *True to Me* effective, young people need to define the appearance ideal that reflects the gender with which they identify. You would need at least one leader for each gender identity group, and to support young people who may identify as gender fluid to participate in a way that feels relevant to them.
If you're using *True to Me* with a mixed group, consider these points:

- Research has shown that this programme works well for single gender groups. Also, young people often say they are more comfortable talking about body confidence in groups with their own gender, but find it interesting to understand the other gender's points of view about this topic. You will still get good results in a mixed gender group, but it will likely be less than in single gender groups.
- Create the appearance ideal in breakout sessions divided by gender, and check everyone is clear that this is the appearance ideal they will challenge throughout *True to Me.*
- Run the more sensitive personal activities in single gender groups, such as the feedback to the What I Know Now and Mirror Time Personal Challenges.
- Consider how the dynamic of your own group will affect the programme, factoring in the maturity of your group and how well formed they are as a team.
- Use your ground rules to keep a safe space and address any challenging behaviours as they arise.
- Use gender specific handouts.
- You could also consider using a different Dove Self-Esteem Project programme, called Confident Me, with a mixed group. This is our school programme and it has been developed for mixed-gender groups of girls and boys. The Confident Me programme is available to download for free on selfesteem.dove.com.

What about other ages?

Girls as young as 6 and 7 are losing body confidence because of the appearance ideal, and it's not an issue that vanishes when you become an adult, either. However, body confidence issues can vary significantly among groups of different ages. If you're working with a wider age range, consider dividing the group with a leader focusing on each age group. You can also adapt the activities accordingly, such as including more storytelling approaches for younger girls (try using images of princesses to help them identify the appearance ideal, for example). Challenge older girls to go deeper into discussions about the causes, costs and solutions to the appearance ideal, and to be more ambitious in their plans to share what they learned with their families and communities.

Tips for leading True to Me

Who's in the lead?

Delivering *True to Me* requires leaders to find a balance between taking the lead and putting girls in the lead. You need to juggle two different roles; the facilitator, who steps back wherever possible, and the leader, who shapes the activities so girls experience the learning steps they need to change their body confidence.

Put girls in the lead when....

- Identifying the appearance ideal and its costs. By defining the ideal for themselves, it will feel relevant to their lives and the rest of *True to Me* will make sense. Whatever cultural and social context you are working in, if girls define the ideal for themselves, *True to Me* will feel relevant.
- They speak out! Each activity uses different mechanisms but, in all cases, the moments when girls generate their own ideas, definitions and challenges are the most important parts of the activity.

> Give girls as much space as you can to speak out against the appearance ideal in a way that will counteract their unconscious beliefs in it.

- Sharing real experiences around the appearance ideal. Try not to give examples of your personal experience of the appearance ideal – as a role model, you may unintentionally reinforce the ideal.
- Taking activities further. When girls spot opportunities to challenge the appearance ideal in their homes or communities, try to support them to take the lead in making this happen. They will practise valuable leadership skills and build a stronger team as a result.

Take the lead when...

- Planning and setting up the sessions. Check you and any other leaders or helpers are very clear on the plan for the session and the experience you want girls to have during each activity.
- Managing how the appearance ideal is talked about. One of the main ways *True to Me* works is when girls verbally challenge the appearance ideal, so we don't want to weaken its impact by letting them verbally agree with or endorse the ideal. If an activity needs statements or scenarios to be read aloud that support the appearance ideal, it's important that you do this and not the girls.
- Discussions go off track. Sometimes, girls will start discussing the appearance ideal in a way that may lead them to positively reinforce it. Watch out for moments where girls may be affirming the appearance ideal, and use questions and the *True to Me* activities to get them focusing back on the costs of the appearance ideal and how to challenge it.

Create a safe space

Although girls mostly find *True to Me* a fun and empowering experience, they may find some moments upsetting, particularly during early sessions, because it touches on ideas that are very personal. There is also a chance that group members may not always treat each other's views with respect.

- Before starting session one, take time to develop your group guidelines (see page 3 of the programme). Have these on display and refer to them throughout the programme.
- Make sure girls are aware of any support systems your group has in case they need extra support, and who they can talk to about this.
- Check leaders understand your organisation's wellbeing policies, such as child protection policies and how to deal with disclosures.

Tips for leading True to Me - continued

What about my own body confidence?

We are all exposed to the appearance ideal every day, so it's not surprising that a lot of women struggle with anxiety about their appearance. Because this programme is focused on tackling the issue in girls, leaders need to put their own concerns to one side when delivering the programme. It's important that girls can see you as positive role models for the ideas they are exploring in *True to Me*.

Try not to share your own opinions or examples from your own life, so girls have the space to discover *True to Me* from their own perspective. Pay attention to the language you use when facilitating the programme to avoid any statements that could reinforce the appearance ideal. Reading through the sessions in advance will help you understand what this could look like. You can still support your group without sharing personal examples. Use questions and supportive responses like "it can be hard to feel that way", "I imagine that can be difficult", "I bet you're not the only one who's had that experience".

Why not try some *True to Me* activities as a leader group before starting the programme? You could also meet with your team of leaders outside of sessions to discuss your experiences and support each other.

Dealing with difficult moments

Most of the time, this programme runs smoothly and girls engage with the concepts. Sometimes, however, some girls will struggle with critically thinking about body image and appearance pressures and ideals. This is not surprising given that our society often makes girls focus on their appearance. In this situation, you want to minimise discussion that reinforces the appearance ideal during sessions, as this programme aims to create a space in which girls challenge these ideals. Here are some of the challenges that may come up and examples of how to respond:

> "I disagree – it's good to look like the appearance ideal because beautiful people have better lives."

- "Is that really true? Do celebrities have perfect lives? Can you think of examples from the news when people who come close to the appearance ideal struggle with their lives?"
- "Try to keep an open mind and let's see how you feel after the next activity. You are free to go back to your old views after the programme if you don't think this new perspective is useful."
- "What does the rest of the group think? Do you think coming close to the appearance ideal equals having a better life?"

> "I don't like this. It feels like you're criticising women and girls who are thin."

- "There's nothing wrong with any one appearance. If people are confident about their natural body type and take care of themselves positively, they can be any shape or size. What we're criticising is the idea that there's just one ideal way to look and we should all sacrifice our health, wellbeing, relationships, success and money to achieve it."
- "Actually, we want to celebrate the beauty in diversity and recognise that girls are so much more than simply the way they look."

> "Are you saying it's not good to look after our bodies?"

- "No. Promoting body confidence is about accepting and taking good care of your body."
- "When you have body confidence, you are more likely to respect and look after your body, including having a balanced relationship with food and engaging in appropriate and pleasurable physical activity."

> "I can't find anything I like about my body."

- "We're so used to putting ourselves down it can be really hard to start seeing things differently. What small things can you start with?"
- "You could start with thinking about things you like about what's inside you or things your body enables you to do."
- "Think about others you care about, like your mum, sisters or friends. What do you like about them? Isn't it true that things you like most about them have nothing to do with the way they look?"

Extras

Glossary

Appearance ideal:

True to Me talks a lot about the appearance ideal. This is the narrow definition of a society's ideal of what is beautiful or attractive. It is so specific that it's impossible to achieve naturally – even models and celebrities have to be digitally altered to match the ideal. The appearance ideal is spread through media and by people talking positively about it.

Body confidence:

someone with body confidence is satisfied with the way their body looks and what their body can do. Having high body confidence is one factor that can raise self-esteem.

Cognitive dissonance:

a psychological process that is triggered when we act in a way that doesn't actually match our beliefs. When we say and do things that contradict our own attitudes, it creates an uncomfortable tension in our brain, so our brain actually changes our attitudes to match our actions and relieve the discomfort!

Self-esteem:

a feeling of self-respect. Someone with high self-esteem believes in themselves, and in their worth as a person. Having high self-esteem helps people reach their full potential, not held back by a lack of belief in themselves or their abilities.

Support prompt:

this is a support feature of the activity packs, where text is shown in orange. It gives leaders help to deliver the key messages of the activities. It's a great idea to read these, then put them in your own words once you understand the message, to make it relevant to your group.

Learn more about the ideas explored in *True to Me* and discover other body confidence resources by visiting selfesteem.dove.com

About the research

The strategies used in this programme have been scientifically developed and evaluated over 16 years of research. Here is a sample of some of this research:

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- Stice E, Rohde P, Shaw H, Gau J (2011). An effectiveness trial of a selected dissonance-based eating disorder prevention program for female high school students: Long-term effects. J Consult Clin Psychol, 79, 500–508.
- Stice E, Marti CN, Spoor S, Presnell K, Shaw H. (2008). Dissonance and healthy weight eating disorder prevention programs: Long-term effects from a randomized efficacy trial. J Consult Clin Psychol, 76, s329–340.

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