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The School Guide

Full of Ourselves

A Wellness Program to Advance Girl Power, Health & Leadership

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Dear Educator,

We thank you for giving girls in your school the opportunity to participate in an exciting educational project called Full of Ourselves: Advancing Girl Power, Health and Leadership¹ (FOO) developed by professionals at McLean Hospital and the Harvard Medical School. A program for healthy, growing girls in middle schools, FOO has been proven to boost girls' self- and body-esteem. Our goal is to help girls stay healthy and confident—"full of themselves" in the best sense of the phrase—by teaching them a range of positive attitudes and behaviors about healthy eating, exercise, body image, and self-care.

For girls to benefit fully from the program, whole-school support is *crucial*. For starters, we encourage you to do the following:

- ♦ Make it possible for girls to attend all of the program sessions.
- ♦ Familiarize yourself with all of the information in this guide.
- ♦ Create a supportive school setting, one that simultaneously addresses risk factors (for disordered eating and body preoccupation) and promotes protective factors.
- ♦ Get as many staff members on board as possible, administrators as well as teachers. Ask everyone to take—and discuss—the school assessment.
- ♦ Provide parent education as outlined in the curriculum. Sponsor a parent education night to educate all interested parents about the content of FOO and how to support your initiative at home.
- ♦ Visit our website at www.mclean.harvard.edu/education/youth for more information

Thank you for your interest and support.

Sincerely,

Catherine and Lisa
Program Developers

¹ This guide has been made for use with: Steiner-Adair, C. & Sjostrom, L., *Full of Ourselves: A Wellness Program to Advance Girl Power, Health & Leadership* (New York: Teachers College Press, © 2005. All rights reserved.) To order copies, contact Teachers College Press at www.teacherscollegepress.com.

Full of Ourselves: 10 Key Ideas

Here are some key ideas girls explore in the FOO program. Is your school environment supportive of these ideas?

- 1. Be “full of yourself” in the very best sense of the phrase** and throw your weight around in healthy ways. Girls need to feel comfortable taking up space in the world and expressing their opinions without hesitation, even in the face of disagreement.
- 2. “Weightism” is a form of prejudice.** Just as it’s cruel and unfair to judge a person by the color of her body, it’s prejudicial to judge someone solely by the size and shape of her body. Research suggests that “weightist” bullying put girls at greater risk for the development of low body-esteem and eating disorders.
- 3. Bring a critical eye to media images.** Research suggests that, after reading popular fashion magazines, girls show increased signs of depression and a drop in body satisfaction. We need to teach girls to bring a discriminating eye to all mainstream media: to take what’s healthy, and leave the rest behind.
- 4. Choose powerful role models,** women and girls who are doing exciting and powerful things.
- 5. Nourish your body with nutritious, “powerful” foods,** not junk foods.
- 6. Fad diets don't work!** If a girl needs to lose weight for health reasons, she should see a school nurse, doctor or nutritionist and learn how to have a healthier all-around lifestyle.
- 7. Tune into and feed all of your many appetites.** Many people eat for reasons other than to satisfy physiological hunger. It’s important to teach girls how *not* to turn to food for non-nutritional reasons; e.g., when they’re “hungry” for companionship, solitude, intellectual stimulation, or physical activity.
- 8. No matter what your size, it’s fun to move and exercise.**
- 9. Relational health is a key aspect of overall well-being.** When girls know how to resolve conflicts, express themselves clearly, and build strong connections with others, they’re less likely to use food as a source of comfort.
- 10. It’s not that looks don’t matter...** but what matters *most*?

10 Tips for Schools: Create a Culture that Supports Student Wellbeing

As you set out to implement Full of Ourselves with girls, create a school-wide climate that supports this eating disorders prevention/health promotion initiative. Here are 10 places to start.

1. **Get as many staff members on board as possible.** Request time at a faculty meeting to present major program themes. Encourage faculty to model acceptance of diverse body shapes, sizes and appearances—starting with their own. Create a protocol of acceptable topics of discussion; for instance, it isn't appropriate for teachers to comment on each other's or a student's weight, no matter how well-intentioned. Provide professional development on health, nutrition, eating disorders, etc.
2. **Provide a range of affordable, fresh, nutritious foods!** Work with food service to provide consistency between food choices in the cafeteria and nutrition information taught in health class. Eliminate vending machines—or stock them with healthier choices.
3. **Check out the visual images in your school.** Do they promote wellbeing and acceptance of diversity? Do posters, books, videos and artwork reflect a diversity of body shapes, sizes and appearances?
4. **Don't weigh kids publicly, ever,** and certainly not on the first day of school. Remove scales from public places where kids with weight preoccupation can ruin their ability to concentrate by getting on the scale.
5. **Review your school's anti-harassment and anti-discrimination policies.** Do these include inequities based on physical appearance and body shape? Provide students formal and informal avenues to report incidents of teasing, bullying or harassment. Include weightism in school diversity awareness campaigns.
6. **Don't discriminate or play favorites on the basis of appearance.** In particular, watch out for favoritism of girls who fit the cultural definition of “pretty”. Whenever possible, see that students of diverse body sizes are chosen as leaders for a variety of tasks: as school reps, in theatrical productions, etc.
7. **Provide parent education.** Sponsor a parent education night to educate all interested parents about the content of Full of Ourselves and how to prevent eating disorders at home.
8. **Designate a school eating disorders resource team.** This might include a school nurse, counselor, teacher, and other staff members who have interest in enhancing students' health. Provide training about eating disorders and treatment. Develop a database of local counseling centers and medical practitioners that serve students with eating and body image issues.
9. **Establish policies and protocols that relate specifically to eating disorders.** Establish a standard protocol for approaching and referring students with possible eating problems. Establish guidelines for contacting parents and liaising with outside health professionals.
10. **Refer at-risk students.** If you are concerned about a student, share your concerns with the eating disorders resource team or other staff members who know the student. Decide together on the best course of action—which may include referral to a qualified professional.

Warning Signs for Eating Disorders

Anorexia nervosa. Bulimia nervosa. Binge eating disorder. These three terms are notably absent from FOO. As our aim is eating disorders *prevention*, we purposefully avoid mention of these diseases. Study after study has found that discussions about specific disordered eating "practices" do more harm than good. So we caution you against discussing eating disorders with girls. Like us, try to keep the focus on power, health and leadership.

That said, eating disorders are serious illnesses; the sooner warning signs and symptoms are recognized and responded to, the better the prognosis. If you're worried about a student, stay calm and share your concerns with a school nurse or counselor. Below is a list of warning signs to help you identify the presence of an eating disorder. While it is rare for one person to display all of these symptoms, people with eating disorders often manifest several of them.

- 1 Excessive preoccupation with weight/weighing, food, calories, and/or dieting
- 2 Excessive and/or compulsive exercise regimen: the need to "burn off" calories regardless of bad weather, fatigue, sickness, and/or injury
- 3 Withdrawal from activities because of the presence of food and/or weight concerns
- 4 Evidence of self-induced vomiting, or use of laxatives, diuretics, purgatives, enemas, diet pills
- 5 Evidence of binge-eating, including hoarding and/or stealing food
- 6 Alternating periods of severely restricting dieting and overeating, often accompanied by dramatic weight fluctuations
- 7 Other unusual eating behaviors: meal skipping, fear of eating in front of other people, ritualistic or secretive eating, cooking for others but not participating in enjoying the food
- 8 Abnormal weight loss of 25% or more, with no known medical illness accounting for the loss
- 9 Distorted body image and anxiety about being fat/weight gain that does not diminish as weight is lost
- 10 Loss of, irregularity of, or inexplicable problems with menstruation (in females)

School Assessment

This audit can be taken by any or all members of your school staff: principals and administrators, teachers, counselors, health staff, etc. Answering the following questions hopefully will stimulate useful discussion about how your school can more effectively promote health, healthy body image and healthy eating behaviors among students and staff. Questions pertain both to addressing risk factors and boosting protective factors. Remember: student wellbeing affects student learning.

School Health Policies & Practices

Are the following policies and practices in place?	Yes	No	Needs review
1. The school has anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies that include harassment and discrimination based on physical appearance and body size/shape.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. The school has a gender equity policy.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. The school offers opportunities for teachers, students, and parents to discuss school policies regarding teasing, bullying, sexual harassment and gender role constraints.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. The school has a protocol for identifying, approaching and referring students at risk for eating problems and disorders.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. The school has a protocol for liaising with parents and outside health professionals regarding students' eating problems.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. The school has designated an eating disorders resource team, with members trained in eating disorders, referral and treatment.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. The school is aware of and has access to external medical, counseling and support services for students with eating and body image issues.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Teachers and staff are provided with information about the signs and symptoms of disordered eating issues.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. The school provides professional development on health, nutrition, body image issues, signs and symptoms of eating disorders, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. The school does not ever publicly weigh students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- | | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| 11. Cafeteria policy links practices with information taught in the health curriculum. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| 12. The cafeteria offers a range of affordable, fresh foods. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| 13. The school has eliminated vending machines stocked with sugary foods and drinks (or stocked them with healthier choices). | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |

School Environment

How satisfied are you with current school practice?

**Very
Satisfied**

**Very
Dissatisfied**

- | | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Teachers and students are supportive of and respectful towards one another. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. The school actively discourages verbal and physical harassment between students and/or staff, including harassment based on body size and appearance. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Students of diverse body size and appearance are chosen as role models in a variety of areas (sports, drama, government, etc.). | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Learning resources (posters, books, videos, activities) reflect a realistic diversity of body shapes, sizes and appearances. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Students have opportunities to make healthy food choices at lunch, throughout the day (e.g., vending machines offer healthy choices), and at special events. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Curriculum

How satisfied are you with current school practice?

**Very
Satisfied**

**Very
Dissatisfied**

- | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. The school has a comprehensive health curriculum (including mental health) offered to all students. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. The curriculum offers opportunities for students to learn about | | | | |

- | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| diversity, including body size and appearance. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Parents have opportunities to learn about the health curriculum (including nutrition, healthy eating, body image). | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Health and PE classes promote positive, inclusive messages; e.g., PE is for everyone, healthy bodies come in a wide variety of sizes, etc. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. The curriculum provides positive food and eating messages; e.g., food is for nourishment, pleasure and energy (not 'good' and 'bad' foods). | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. Curricula or programs are in place that allow students to explore a range of personal and social issues: gender stereotyping, bullying, prevention, conflict resolution, effective communication skills, etc. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Staff Members

How often do the following practices occur in school?

Always | Sometimes | Rarely

- | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Staff members act as role models by their positive interactions with students, parents, and each other. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Staff members are not discriminatory towards students, staff and parents on the basis of diverse physical appearance and body size | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Staff members do not play favorites on the basis of appearance. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Staff role-model healthy attitudes and behaviors toward their own eating, body image and physical activity. E.g., they do not discuss dieting or weight-related issues with students or colleagues. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Staff members pro-actively respond to all incidents of teasing and bullying. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Students

Do students have the chance to learn about the following?	Yes	No	Not covered
1. Healthy nutrition and eating habits/attitudes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Healthy exercise and activity habits/attitudes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. The dangers of dieting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Natural weight and body changes, especially during puberty	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Gender stereotyping	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Media literacy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Communication and assertiveness skills (to counter teasing and bullying)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Conflict resolution skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Stress management/relaxation skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Decision making/problem solving skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Priority list of action steps:
