

BUILDING BETTER BODY IMAGE IN DANCERS

Guide + Workbook



FOR DANCE TEACHERS

BY DIFFERENT DRUMMER DANCE



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INTRODUCTION



*It's time dancers
learned how to
befriend their
bodies*

For too long, dance education and dance culture have placed looks, performance, and competition before the mental and physical health of dancers.

Dance Educators play a special role in breaking the harmful traditions and practices that have been perpetuated in dance culture through generations.

That's why I'm here, and that's why you're here - welcome! I'm Katrena Cohea, Director & Founder of Different Drummer Dance, and the creator of this Workbook.

In these pages, you'll find materials that will help you understand why resilient body image, body kindness, and body positivity (I'll use these terms interchangeably) are so important to the next generation of dancers, why it's especially difficult for dancers to have positive body image, and action steps you can begin to take today to develop body kind habits and practices inside, and outside the dance classroom.

At the end of the Workbook, you'll find some suggested Next Steps for how to keep the momentum you've built going. There are suggestions for books to read, online courses you can take, and blogs you can read to further your knowledge of body kindness and dancer wellness.

Thank you again for your support and for prioritizing this important topic. The fact that you're here, doing this work, shows that there's a much needed shift happening in the dance world, and I'm honored to be building safer, happier, and healthier spaces for dancers with you!

♥
Katrena

BODY IMAGE DATA

Body image affects everyone, but most acutely, it affects girls, women and those identifying as female. Dance culture is rampant with unhealthy appearance and food monitoring practices, and self-objectification has become the norm.

But it doesn't take much to uncover that girls, teens, and women are crying out for help.

98% Of girls feel there is an immense pressure from external sources to look a certain way.

National Report on Self Esteem

92% Of teen girls would like to change something about the way they look, with body weight ranking the highest.

The Dove Campaign

1 in 4 Today fall into a clinical diagnosis – depression, eating disorders, cutting, and other mental/emotional disorders.

The Triple Bind, Steven Hinshaw

3 xs Female characters are three times more likely to be shown in sexually revealing clothing and to be verbally objectified in top rated kids/family movies.

Beauty Redefined Website

RAISING DANCERS WITH BETTER BODY IMAGE

If we want to build better body image for the next generation of dancers, we have to do three things:

- 1 Become aware of the ways our world, society, and culture, objectify girls and women
- 2 Understand the complex intersection of that objectification with dance, a visual and aesthetic art form/sport
- 3 Make mindful choices about how we approach dance education with the above in mind

This is a complex issue, and not something that will be solved overnight. The process of raising dancers with better body image (and also improving our own personal body image) is a marathon, not a sprint. It will take commitment, trial, error, and continuous learning.

First, let's break down what objectification is:

ob·jec·ti·fi·ca·tion
/əbjektəfə'kāSH(ə)n/

noun

1. the action of degrading someone to the status of a mere object.



The first, and probably most obvious way we can identify with objectification is through the media. Magazine covers are splashed with women who often all look the same, are heavily make-upped, scantily clad, and airbrushed to a T. Headlines are usually full of innuendo, or focus on weight loss, anti-aging, or relationship status, thus reducing the person on the cover to a collection of body parts and status identifiers.



Movies and TV shows often follow the same model. (Case in point: in the 2015 movie Jurassic World, Bryce Dallas Howard, the main female star, is running through dangerous obstacle courses in high heels, and a sweat drenched white suit, while her male counterparts are wearing jeans and boots.) In the movies, women and girls are typically dressed for looks, while boys and men are dressed for function.



And the next time you can compare boy's and girls' clothing in a store, take a look to see how often words like 'cute', 'pretty', and 'beautiful' appear on girl's clothing, versus how often appearance based words appear on boy's clothing. While this might seem innocent, the message that girls end up receiving is that their looks are the most important thing about them.

RAISING DANCERS WITH BETTER BODY IMAGE

All these facts point to a culture that sees women as objects, rather than living, breathing humans, who are capable of much more than simply looking pretty. Objectifying aims to keep people in one dimension; it wants us to see only surface level things, whether that be beautiful, fit, famous, young, or wanted.

But the media isn't the only culprit in objectification. Our cultures and personal interactions often reinforce objectifying girls and women. We greet little girls by telling them 'you look so pretty in that dress' (which focuses on looks and appearance), while we ask little boys about dinosaurs and sports (which focuses on interests and physicality).



Objectification washes over us so constantly and consistently, that we come to have an out-of-body experience with it. It becomes so normal that we begin to view ourselves as objects; focusing on our looks, our body size, and weight, and seeing these elements as the sum of our value in the world.

Reflect on your own history and experience with objectification. Were there any experiences that caused disruption to how you saw, or felt about yourself or your body?



RAISING DANCERS WITH BETTER BODY IMAGE

Now that we have an understanding of objectification, let's turn to the intersection between objectification and dance - a visual, and aesthetic art form, and sport.

There's no getting around the fact that all forms of dance are visual, and have a huge emphasis on looks and appearance. In most sports, either team or individual, a player's performance is evaluated on what they do (score a goal, hit a home run, etc.) The scores, and ability to win don't have anything to do with a player's appearance.

But dance does. This doesn't mean dance is evil, or bad, but it does mean that we as dance educators, have to proceed with caution. It means we must be aware, proactive, and protective about mitigating the possible negative side effects of developing poor body image, low confidence, and mental health damage.

"In a world where the objectification of women is the norm, not all sports and exercise activities are created equal. Ask yourself, 'In this activity, or sport, are women's bodies used or viewed as something instrumental or ornamental, or both?'"

- Lindsay & Lexie Kite, PhDs & Authors of *More Than a Body*

Reflect on this. Are bodies in dance viewed as something instrumental, ornamental, both?



RAISING DANCERS WITH BETTER BODY IMAGE

So how can we move forward from here, and make mindful choices about teaching resilient body image within the dance classroom setting?

- 1 One of the most impactful things we can change to set a better example for our dancers is our language, both verbal, and written.
- 2 The second proactive step we can take to raise dancers with better body image is to expand our definitions of what dancers look like, and show our students dancers exist in all shapes, sizes, skin colors, able bodied and dis-abled bodies, races, ethnicities, cultures, identities, and backgrounds.
- 3 Third, get curious and mindful! Think critically about how objectification is built into our society, and how it's ingrained in dance culture. Continue to observe where cultural objectification intersects with objectification in dance, and ask yourself what some possible solutions could be.

Reflect on what you've learned about body image, objectification, self-esteem, dance traditions, and your own personal experiences. What action steps can you commit to taking that will begin to improve your student's body image?



TOUGH CONVO TIPS

Tough conversations around body image and mental health will happen with your students. Don't shy away from them. Your dancers look to you for guidance, so be prepared with these tips, so you can guide them towards resilience, empathy, critical thinking, and kindness.



BRING THEM BACK TO THE PRESENT MOMENT

Help your students avoid the worst case scenario thinking/feeling by getting them back into the present moment with questions like these:

- Can you take a deep breath with me?
- What's happening for you right now?
- What thoughts are visiting you right now?
- What are your feelings telling you in this moment?



BUILD THEIR MIND/BODY CONNECTION

Encourage your students to recognize the communication they're receiving from their bodies with questions like these:

- Where are you feeling these feelings in your body?
- What sensations are you feeling in your body?
- What images are coming to your mind right now?
- Take 5 deep inhales and exhales. Do you feel any different after?



ENCOURAGE COMPASSION

Help your students name the feelings they're experiencing in a mindful, and nonjudgmental way, with statements and questions like these:

- Ouch, this hurts.
- That must be painful/hurtful.
- What do you need right now?
- How can I support you?
- If your friend was going through what you are, what would you say, or do for them?



GIVE CLOSURE

Reassure your students that you're there for them, and help them feel some closure with the following statements:

- Your feelings are important, and I'm glad you shared with me. I'm always here for you and want to support you.
- I wonder what would happen if you kept treating yourself like you would a friend who was having a rough day?

TOUGH CONVO TIPS



WHAT IF... THEY CALL THEMSELVES, OR SOMEONE ELSE, FAT?

Be neutral. Fat isn't good, or bad, just like being tall, or short isn't good or bad. Take the stigma and fear out of fat with a neutral response. If you respond with, "that's awful, don't say that, you/other person is beautiful!", you're actually reinforcing the belief that fat is bad, and the opposite of beautiful, even if your intention is to help the student see the beauty in themselves, or another person.

Talk about the function of fat to re-direct the conversation. "Fat on your body means you're alive and healthy.", or "Our bodies use fat to protect our organs, and uses it for energy, isn't that cool?"



WHAT IF... THEY'RE LOOKING FOR A COMPLIMENT?

It's totally natural and normal for all of us to seek validation, and there's nothing wrong with that! It's nice to be admired and praised. We can give compliments that are looks or appearance based to reinforce to dancers that we see them as much more than bodies, or their looks.

"I see you working really hard today, I'm proud of you!"

"You were so welcoming to that new student, thank you!"

"I'm so inspired by your dedication and focus, you're so clever."

"I can always count on you to make me smile, it's just what I needed today!"



WHAT IF... I HEAR A DANCER TALKING ABOUT DIETING, OR RESTRICTING FOOD?

Talk to her about objectification, and how many companies make money off of convincing us we need to look differently, weigh less, or exercise more. Place emphasis on eating and exercising for how it makes our bodies feel, and talk about how our bodies need food for many different reasons (to give us energy, help us sleep, protect our immune system, etc.).



WHAT IF... MY STAFF, OR A DANCER'S PARENT IS ALWAYS TALKING ABOUT WEIGHT LOSS, OR COMPLIMENTING LOOKS/THINNESS?

With parents, be kind but firm about what your studio believes and how you're actively working with all dancers to dismantle the 'thinner is better' mindset, and encourage them to see themselves for more than their appearance. Admit it's hard work and you're all learning, but you know the effort will be worth it. If you're not comfortable doing that, re-direct the conversation to highlight that the dancer is more than their body and looks, with something like, "Sarah has been working so diligently in class and has really improved in the last month! Sarah, can you talk more about what you've been focusing on?"

With staff, you should be explicit about what the studio's values, mission, and policies are on this topic. Meet with them one on one to reiterate this, and give them suggestions for better language to use. Emphasize why this is so important to you, and how proud you are to have staff who are all on the same page and making a difference on an important topic like this.

IMPORTANT!

Check your state's law on mandated reporters.

As a teacher, you likely are one, and are responsible for reporting any situation where you're concerned about abuse or neglect.

CONVERSATION CARDS

Cut out these cards and use them with your dancers (all ages and all levels) to open up a discussion about body image, body positivity, and body kindness. Try these at the beginning or end of your class; they pair great with the worksheets included here!

What does the term 'body image' mean to you?

What does it mean to you to be body confident?

What is objectification?

What are compliments we can give that aren't appearance based?

What do you want people to know about you?

What are some amazing things your body does for you?

CONVERSATION CARDS

Cut out these cards and use them with your dancers (all ages and all levels) to open up a discussion about body image, body positivity, and body kindness. Try these at the beginning or end of your class; they pair great with the worksheets included here!

When do you
feel best in your
body?

When do you feel
worst in your
body?

Do you ever
have
conversations
with your body?

How does it
feel when you
compare
yourself to
others?

What are the
pros and cons of
comparison?

What would it
take for you to
see your body
as your BFF?

CHOOSING BODY KIND DRESS CODES & COSTUMES

A constructive dance dress code that builds body confidence is one that prioritizes how dancers feel in their own bodies and clothing. This can be tricky, since it can mean that it goes against traditional dance dress codes. If you notice any resistance to the following tips, see if you can notice that resistance with a gentle focus and get curious about it. Oftentimes, our resistance to new ways of thinking about looks, bodies, modesty, and clothing are deeply rooted in cultural lessons and practices of making girls and women objects to be looked at. Ask yourself what fears you might have behind any hesitation to lighten up on the dress code.

Hyper-specific dress codes, or costume choices can actually do more harm than good, by unintentionally sexualizing dancers, or sending the message that covering, or exposing their bodies is more important than how they feel in their bodies. It can also reinforce the idea that what bodies look like is more important than what bodies can do.

Dance dress codes usually specify clothing options with the intention of being able to see lines, placement, and alignment, to ensure safe training. This can still be the case, AND, at the same time, we can find ways to open up our dress codes to teach dancers that they are more than a collection of body parts to be looked at.

Use the following tips to guide your choices for creating a dress code that also builds body confidence:

- Create a dress code with the wearer in mind
- Focus on feeling and function over how articles of clothing look
- Prioritize comfort, experience, and expression when choosing both class dress code items and costume items
- Gender neutral dress codes can be freeing for everyone, since it levels the playing field for everyone
- Get your teachers and staff on board with whatever new policies you put into place, and ask that they abide by the same standard you're holding students to.
- If you can tell that a dancer is uncomfortable in their class, or costume attire, don't sweep it under the rug. Address it in an open, honest, and kind way with the student, and potentially their parent, to arrive at a compromise that works for everyone.
- Talk openly with students about pressures to look, and dress in certain ways, and encourage them to see not only their bodies as instruments, rather than ornaments, but see other bodies in the same light as well

BODY KIND DRESS CODE SCRIPT

At (insert dance studio name), we value (insert your studio's values). We strive to create an inclusive, welcoming, and universally kind environment for our dancers and their families. This is reflected in our dress code through the following policies:

Dancers should be able to dress their bodies for classes in a manner that expresses their individuality, while also allowing teachers to assess alignment and placement that is safe and correct for each dancer's individual body.

Below is a list of recommended clothing options for dance class. If you, or your dancer have questions or concerns about any of these items, or would like to add to them, please reach out to the Director. We welcome expanding this list in support of all dancers' mental and physical well-being.

- Tights that match dancer skin color
- Pink tights
- Black tights
- Leotards
- Leggings
- Shorts that fully cover private parts
- Tops
- Clothing that carries sexually suggestive, libelous, violent, or criminal messaging is off-limits.
- (If you have specific, or more items for clothing, insert them here.)
- Dancers should be able to style their hair for classes in a manner that expresses their individuality. Within those parameters, hair should not obscure the vision of the student, or be distracting to the student. (If you have specific hair requirements for different styles of dance classes, insert them here.)
- List your shoe requirements for dance classes here.

At (insert dance studio name), we will abide by the following:

Dress code enforcement will not create disparities, reinforce or increase marginalization of any group, nor will it be more strictly enforced against dancers because of racial identity, ethnicity, sexual orientation, cultural or religious identity, household income, body size/type, or body maturity. Dancers and staff are responsible for managing their personal distractions in regards to appearance and clothing options.



DANCE GOALS JOURNALING PROMPTS

for dancers

1

WHAT HAS THIS YEAR TAUGHT YOU SO FAR?

2

WHAT'S ONE THING YOU WANT TO
ACCOMPLISH THIS FALL?

3

WHY IS THAT GOAL IMPORTANT TO YOU?

4

WHAT STEPS NEED TO BE TAKEN TO REACH
YOUR GOAL?

5

WHO CAN YOU ASK FOR SUPPORT AS YOU
WORK TOWARDS YOUR GOAL?

6

HOW WOULD YOUR PAST SELF BE PROUD
OF YOU TODAY?





BODY CONFIDENCE JOURNALING PROMPTS

for dancers

1

THIS SEASON, MY BODY NEEDS

2

I FEEL BEST IN MY BODY WHEN

3

I FEEL WORST IN MY BODY WHEN

4

I CAN BE KINDER TO MY MIND, AND BODY BY

5

THIS SCHOOL YEAR I'M GRATEFUL FOR

6

AT THE DANCE STUDIO I'M GRATEFUL FOR





BODY CONFIDENCE JOURNALING PROMPTS

for dancers

1

WHAT INFLUENCES HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT
YOUR BODY?

2

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO FEEL BETTER ABOUT
YOUR BODY MORE OFTEN?

3

HAVE YOU EVER FELT JUDGED BY SOMEONE
BECAUSE OF HOW YOU LOOKED OR DRESSED?

4

HAVE YOU EVER JUDGED SOMEONE BECAUSE
OF HOW THEY LOOKED OR DRESSED?

5

HOW DOES JUDGEMENT FEEL IN
YOUR BODY?

6

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO REMEMBER WHEN YOU
START TO JUDGE YOURSELF OR SOMEONE ELSE?

BODY KIND AFFIRMATION CARDS

Cut out these cards and keep them in your dance bag for when you need reminders to be kind to yourself.

I use respectful
words when I
talk about
myself

I am kind to
myself, the same
way I am kind
to others

I am more
than my
reflection in
the mirror

My body is an
instrument,
not an
ornament

The way I look is
just part of who I
am and has
nothing to do
with my worth

I am grateful
for all my body
does for me

BODY KIND AFFIRMATION CARDS

Cut out these cards and keep them in your dance bag for when you need reminders to be kind to yourself.

My body may
change, but
my worth
does not

I don't need to rely
on others for
validation about
my appearance

My body is the
least
interesting
thing
about me

What others
say about my
body has to
do with them,
not me

I appreciate the
hard work my
body does to
keep me going

I choose kind
and respectful
thoughts
about myself

BODY KIND AFFIRMATION CARDS

Use this page to create your own body kind affirmations, mantras, or statements. If you have a hard time coming up with some, ask your friends or dance teacher(s) for help!

A large light gray rounded rectangle divided into four quadrants by dashed lines, intended for writing affirmations.



BEFRIEND YOUR BODY

If your body was your best friend, what would you...

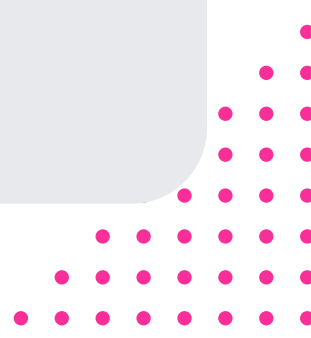
Say to it?

Do for it?

If your body was your best friend, what would you NOT...

Say to it?

Do for it?



NEXT STEPS

Follow the suggestions below to continue your body kind dance journey!



Read More

Here are some must reads for body kind dance educators:

- Body Kindness by Rebecca Scritchfield
- The Body is Not An Apology by Sonya Renee Taylor
- More Than A Body: Your Body Is an Instrument, Not an Ornament by Lexie and Lindsay Kite



Join BKDC

Become a Body Kind Dance Club Member, or join my other online courses to expand your knowledge on dancer wellness:

- Scan the QR code to access membership and course options



Stay Connected

Keep in touch and up to date with a community of like minded dance educators and experts:

- Different Drummer Dance Blog - differentdrummerdance.com/blog
- Instagram & Facebook - @diffdrumdance
- Reach out to book a Workshop - katrene@differentdrummerdance.com

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