

# MY BODY & I

PRERANA'S GROUP COUNSELLING  
SESSION ON BODY IMAGE

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People often ask us to share about the methods and practices we use when interacting with our children as well as how we work on the coalface. This is an attempt at sharing the techniques and methods used during our counselling session.

Mohitha Manoharan joined the Prerana family as a counsellor this year. She has a master's degree in Applied Psychology with a specialization in counselling psychology from Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. At Prerana, she works with children across all our projects.

Aside from individual counselling sessions, she also regularly conducts group counselling session with children across our centers and in various Shelter Homes we work with.

*Group sessions help address a group of clients simultaneously as opposed to one client, as in individual sessions. Hence, it is more efficient when the goal is to disseminate information. Group sessions also help the clients feel like they belong to a community and helps the counsellor observe interaction patterns of clients while in the group.*

Through this document we would like to share one of the group sessions conducted by our counsellor at a Shelter Home.

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'Body Image' has been something regularly discussed and talked about today, it is also one of the rising problems among Indian adolescents in recent times. Body image issues is often seen in young girls which is why it was an important topic to be discussed in a Shelter Home.

*The Shelter Home is for girls, especially those in need of care and protection. The Home offers a nurturing space for children in need of safe shelter and a supportive, loving environment that understands the needs of these children. The Home provides its girls with educational programs, health care, arranges meeting with the girls' mothers or guardians, psychosocial support and recreational facilities.*

The counsellor began the session by screening 3 mainstream advertisements that are usually shown during breaks on television.

- 'Fair & Lovely' - [watch here](#)



The advertisement shows a woman who was extremely talented at dance but does not succeed because of her dark skin. She goes on to receive immense appreciation after using 'Fair & Lovely' to become fair.

- ‘Lipton Green Tea’ - [watch here](#)



The advertisement shows different women feeling ashamed of their belly fat and a celebrity endorsing 'Lipton Green Tea' to reduce belly fat in order to gain confidence.

- ‘Himalaya Neem Face Wash’ - [watch here](#)



The third advertisement showcased a woman hiding inside her house because of a pimple and gaining confidence to go outside after using 'Himalaya Neem Face Wash' to get rid of the pimple.

The girls were asked to share their thoughts on the videos. They all agreed and said that all the women in the advertisements had ‘*nakra*’ (they were being fussy). One girl shared that she felt like the three advertisements were trying to tell them to use those products to be better. The counsellor used this as a starting point for a discussion on how constant exposure to such advertisements could make women feel like they are not good enough. The girls were questioned about the realism in the advertisements while emphasizing on the importance of self-love.

The idea behind showing them these advertisements was to start a conversation in an attempt to help the girls eventually ignore the messages given out by these advertisements.

The girls were then shown pictures of some famous Bollywood and Tollywood female actors – Kareena Kapoor, Alia Bhatt, Anushka Sharma, Samantha Akkineni, Hansika Motwani, Tamanna Bhatia etc. They were encouraged to share what was common among all these actors.

*According to Barve, Sood, Nithya, Virmani (2015) - Communication about the media within families can help in decreasing the negative impact of advertising. Although this is a long process, it helps to encourage children to question the standards the society has set for them.*

One of the girls said that they were all beautiful. The counsellor used this statement and encouraged the girls to think about why they said the actors were beautiful? Were they referred to as beautiful just because of their fair complexion? As a response to that the girls went on to name a few actors who were not ‘fair’ like Kajol and Konkana Sen Sharma but agreed that this was an exception more than a norm in the film industry.

One of the girls shared that a staff member told them that it is important to remain fit because ‘fat’ people have more health concerns. This was an important point raised and the girls were appreciated for doing the same. They were encouraged to differentiate between health and beauty. In other words, individuals need to be encouraged to strive for fitness but not shamed as being ‘ugly’ if they fail to achieve fitness and are deemed ‘fat’.

While it is important to remain fit in order to avoid health concerns, being fit does not always translate into skinny/thin and fat definitely does not mean ugly. While discussing health, the counsellor also emphasized on eating disorders, mainly anorexia nervosa – an eating disorder where in an individual starves themselves. The health concerns of starving oneself to become skinny were also discussed and pictures were displayed.

*It is important that when conducting a discussion like this, where in a lot of information is shared, activities should be used to help the individual engage and recall the session.*

During the session the girls engaged in an activity that would help them not only recall the session, but also encourage them to relate the information to themselves creating self-awareness.

The girls were asked to write down descriptions of their body parts. Some examples were eyes, nose, tummy, breasts, height, butt, legs and the like. Some of the descriptions were, their nose was 'beautiful', 'too big', 'hairy' or any other adjectives they considered an appropriate description of what they felt. They were not forced to read their lists out loud because the goal of the activity was to increase self-awareness. However, they were split into 3 groups to discuss and answer four questions. The questions asked to them were:

1. I like \_\_\_\_ about my body because \_\_\_\_\_.
2. I hate \_\_\_\_ about my body because \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Why do I dislike this about my body and where did I learn to dislike it?
4. Does my body deserve my love? Why/why not?

It was interesting to see that each individual in the groups liked different things about their bodies, ranging from their eyes to their tummy for different reasons.

One girl liked her body because she thought it was the perfect shape while another liked her tummy because she thought it was cute. These individual differences were highlighted in the group. While different people disliked different things about their bodies, a common concern raised was the size of breasts. One girl shared that she felt her breasts were too big and it was inconvenient when she played games. To reassure her, the other girls complimented her and shared that they thought her overall body was beautiful. Another girl felt her breasts were too small although she was almost an adult. This made the group to laugh at the fact that she wanted bigger breasts. The counsellor ensured that the concept of breasts was normalized in the session and the girls were told that everybody had breasts. Talking about breasts and having concerns related to them was nothing to be ashamed of irrespective of the way society portrays it. The girls were reminded that many women feel the same way about their breasts, which is why the clothing industry manufactures bras of different sizes because everyone is meant to have different breast sizes.

The counsellor also used the technique of self-disclosure and shared some of her adolescent insecurities to normalize the group's insecurities.

A girl shared that some adults had told her that having breasts that were too small would lead to health concerns after child birth.

*Self-disclosure, in therapy, helps individuals feel like they are not alone and helps normalize having problems.*

The counsellor reassured her, emphasizing that having small breasts don't lead to health concerns later in life. Another girl shared that she did not like a mole on her face while one shared that she did not like her chin because it made her look old. At hearing this the group was very supportive towards each other. The girl also shared ideas to help each other navigate through their insecurities. It was also interesting to note that some girls loved their whole body and did not have any insecurities.

Having a positive body image is an ongoing process, sometimes a person would need to work harder at creating a positive environment for themselves. It was essential that the session ended with the counsellor reminding the girls that *"The best remedy for all body concerns is to try and love yourself just the way you are. No matter what the world says, especially after you move out of the Shelter Home. Each of you is worthy and beautiful"*. To reinstil this a video 'Different shades of beautiful' ([watch here](#)) was shown.

## THE FOLLOW UP

When conducting such sessions, it is important that the children are followed up with. To do this the counsellor met with the girls once again and asked them to share their thoughts on the session. Speaking about the changes the session on body image brought upon them, they said that they learned to love themselves more, that they needed to be grateful for what they had and become more aware of their bodies and individual differences. They mentioned learning that everybody is beautiful in their own way and it was not nice to pass comments on other people's bodies. They were confident that they would ignore other people's negative comments. Beauty to them now meant self-acceptance, self-love, something that is deeper than their physical body, intellectual capacity etc.

**Please note:** This document is a work in progress. Feel free to share your suggestions or ask questions on [fighttraffickingindia@gmail.com](mailto:fighttraffickingindia@gmail.com)