

Introduction

Are you dissatisfied with the way you look?

Do you try to hide parts of your appearance?

Do you avoid going to certain places or doing certain things because of your concerns about how you look?

Do you worry that people will laugh at you or talk about you behind your back because of how you look?

Do you spend a lot of time thinking negatively about how you look?

Do you feel that you have to do certain things in order to make yourself feel better about how you look?

Do you spend a lot of time checking how you look in the mirror?

Do you judge yourself negatively as a person because of how you look?

Do you frequently seek reassurance from others about how you look?

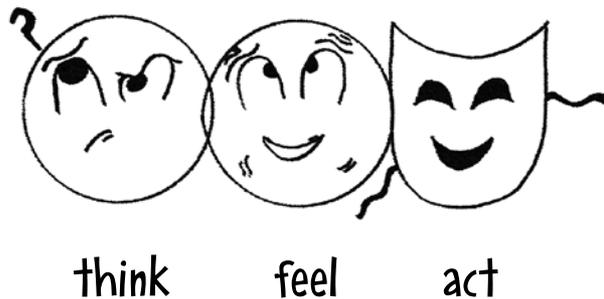
Do you frequently compare yourself to others and believe you look worse than they do?

Do your concerns about how you look have negative impacts on you and your life?

If you have answered 'Yes' to any of the questions above, then *Banish Your Body Image Thief* is here to help you!

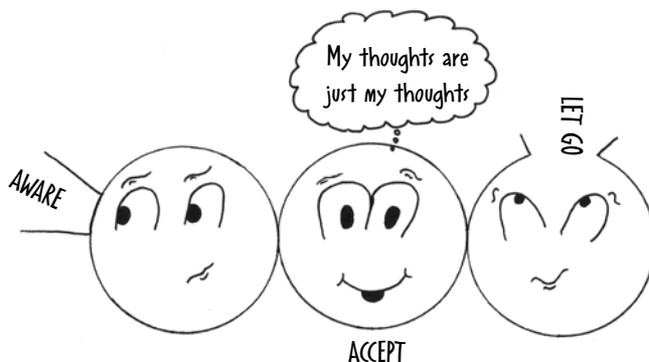
Banish Your Body Image Thief provides self-help tools that can be suitable for young people with varying levels of body image concerns. This workbook is based on something called cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and something called mindfulness.

CBT is where a therapist helps people to deal with a wide range of emotional problems, including body image concerns, by looking at the links between how we THINK (our cognition), how we FEEL (our physical feelings and emotions) and how we ACT (our behaviour).



Mindfulness originates from the spiritual discipline of Buddhism and from meditation and yoga practices. When we practise mindfulness we make a choice to:

- become AWARE of our thoughts and feelings in the here and now
- ACCEPT our thoughts and feelings as they are, without criticising or judging them or ourselves or viewing them as reality
- LET negative thoughts and feelings GO instead of focusing on them over and over and over again.



As you progress through this workbook, you will complete activities that will teach you about CBT and mindfulness in order to help you banish your Body Image Thief and improve your body image.

Because body image concerns come in many different shapes and sizes just as our bodies do and because there are many different strategies that can help people to overcome their body image concerns, I couldn't put this book together in a few pages! But please don't let the length of this workbook put you off completing it! Working through this book as a whole will provide you with the fullest knowledge and the most opportunities to practise what you have learnt through a variety of activities. However, if you want to make a quick start or feel that certain parts aren't as relevant to you as others, then please feel free to dip in and out of the parts that are most important to you. But don't forget that you can always return to the full book at any time in the future.

For some young people, this workbook may not be the only help they will need. Sometimes, self-help tools alone are not sufficient to help a person to make all the changes and improvements that they need to. In some cases, it is important for a person to seek treatment from a mental health professional, such as a psychologist, psychiatrist, counsellor or therapist – for example, if a person's body image concerns are severe and/or accompanied by other mental health disorders, such as eating disorders, body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) or depression, or negative coping strategies, such as substance abuse or self-harming (which we will explore in Chapter 9). If this is the case, this workbook is suitable to be used alongside such professional treatment. Also, please note that you may need to talk to someone you can trust such as a parent, relative, friend, teacher or counsellor if working through this book raises difficult issues for you.

So now that you have learnt about this workbook, its purpose, its basis and who it is suitable for, let's get started on banishing your Body Image Thief and overcoming your body image concerns!

1

What is Body Image?

Step 1 of improving your body image is to understand what body image is. Now although this is really important, I don't need to spend pages and pages explaining it. Let's keep it simple. Your body image is...

**how you think and feel about your body
or your appearance or your looks.**

Here are some examples of thoughts and feelings that other young people have about their bodies.

'I'm so spotty it's horrible! I'm so ashamed.' (Fran, 14)

'I'm not perfect, but hey, who is? I'm just me and that's OK!' (Sally, 12)

'I'll never get a girlfriend unless I lose weight!' (Karl, 16)

'I hate my body. All of it!' (George, 11)

'I can't wait until I'm old enough to make my own decisions about my hair. The moment I am, I'm getting rid of the ginger ugliness that sits on my head. I'm dyeing it blonde. After all, every guy loves a blonde!' (Vicky, 13)

'I don't care what anyone else says or thinks about how I look! I'm happy with myself. That's what counts.' (Clive, 14)

'I can't help being thin, but all the adults think I'm anorexic, all the girls at school hate me and the boys laugh at me for being flat chested. I hate how I look!' (Lily, 16)

'So I'm never going to be blonde, tall, skinny and leggy and get drooled over like Melanie in my year at school. But I know it's who you are as a person that's important!' (Kristen, 12)

'I'm so ugly. No-one else would ever want to look like me! I'm worthless.' (Roisin, 10)

'I'm so worried that no-one will ever find me attractive as I don't have a six-pack!' (Marlon, 15)

'I'm such a wimp! I have arms like matchsticks.' (Ollie, 15)

These thoughts and feelings can also impact on how people behave and on their lives in general. Here are the same young people describing how they act in response to their thoughts and feelings about their bodies.

'I spend hours picking at my skin in front of a mirror. But then I make my spots worse and feel even more ashamed.' (Fran, 14)

'I enjoy going shopping for new clothes.' (Sally, 12)

'I am constantly trying to diet and I spend hours looking in the mirror and pinching at my skin to see if I have lost any weight.' (Karl, 16)

'I avoid looking in the mirror and I wear big, baggy clothes that hide my body.' (George, 11)

'I can't leave the house unless I have one of my bandanas or hats on my head. School wouldn't let me wear them in class so I started skipping school. My mum home schools me now.' (Vicky, 13)

'I eat healthily and exercise regularly because I know it's important to be healthy, not because I have to look a certain way.' (Clive, 14)

'I started self-harming two years ago to try and cope with the comments people make about me.' (Lily, 16)

'I just ignore the comments other girls at school make about my height and my glasses!' (Kristen, 12)

'I try on so many different outfits before I go out to play with my friends after school and I constantly ask my mum if I look OK.' (Roisin, 10)

'I bully other people about how they look so I don't get bullied back.' (Marlon, 15)

'I spend hours every evening on my gym equipment at home and have started stealing my older brother's protein shakes.' (Ollie, 15)

Some of the young people above have a positive body image and some of them have a negative body image. You will learn more about the links between our thoughts, feelings and behaviours and how these links help to determine whether we have a positive or a negative body image as you progress through this workbook, as understanding this is key to improving your body image.



think

feel

act

But first you need to assess exactly how you think and feel about your body at this point in time and what impacts these thoughts and feelings are having on your behaviours and on your life in general. This is Step 2 in improving your body image. There is a questionnaire in the next chapter to help you to do this.