



HIGH PERFORMANCE
SPORT NEW ZEALAND

***GUIDELINES
FOR SUPPORTING
POSITIVE BODY
IMAGE BY
OPTIMISING
PERFORMANCE
CULTURE***

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Intention

These guidelines aim to support sporting organisations and their people in the implementation of safe and supportive performance cultures that promote positive body image. By creating performance environments for (and with) athletes and by strengthening support and protective factors, we aim to contribute to the enhancement of a positive body image. Successful implementation of these guidelines requires the collective effort of the entire sporting community.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document provides sporting organisations with guidelines to foster a positive performance culture that celebrates body diversity. Its intended audience is everyone in the sporting community, including but not limited to coaches, support staff, management, athletes and their parents and/or caregivers.

Body image is a complex and dynamic interplay of thoughts, feelings, perceptions and sensations we experience in our bodies. It is influenced by internal factors (e.g. personality, direct and witnessed lived experiences, gender identity, sexual orientation, functionality) and external factors (e.g. school, training and sporting environment, messages from family, peers, culture about body-related expectations).

It is the responsibility of everyone within the sporting community to be aware of the impact that an unsupportive performance culture could have on athletes' body image, and therefore the health, wellbeing and performance of athletes regardless of sex, gender, age or sport (including para-athletes).

Biases from people within the sporting community towards aesthetics and weight, as well as a lack of access to professional support, can lead to athletes' developing a negative body image. Additionally, sporting environments can cause added pressures due to performance factors, being in the public eye, social media and other pressures.

Dispelling myths linking the athlete's body composition to performance may create a culture that encourages body diversity and focuses on performance rather than appearance. Education and raising awareness within the sporting community are needed to enhance protective factors and minimise the risk factors. An important factor that shapes body image is the use of inclusive and respectful language that focuses on functionality and performance, avoiding body shaming and negative body talk.

Further practical recommendations include:

- Avoid making appearance-based comparisons
- Expect an athlete's body will change over their athletic career e.g. training phase, injury, adolescence, pregnancy etc.
- Encourage athletes to fuel for the training/work they are doing.
- Avoid inappropriate weigh ins or other body checks
- Avoid inappropriate weight-based comments and body shaming.
- Encourage athletes to work with professionals (Medical Doctor, Registered Nutritionist/Dietitian, Clinical Psychologist)
- Create a culture where athletes feel safe discussing body image concerns without fear of judgement and/or fear of deselection.

The following guidelines stress the importance of a positive performance culture, ongoing education, and support for athletes. By fostering an environment that values body diversity and psychological well-being, the sporting community can reduce body dissatisfaction and promote overall health and performance.

Please note, the treatment of athletes presenting with poor body satisfaction must be individualised to the athlete. Those treatment decisions should be made with the appropriate healthcare providers and falls out of the scope of this document

Guidelines

- Avoid engaging in and/or allowing weight-based comments as this causes significant harm and is linked to body dissatisfaction, such as increased dieting, disordered eating behaviours and risky diet behaviours e.g. skipping meals and taking diet pills.

Prioritise describing a person's body function over appearance.

- Comments about body shape and weight teasing are a type of bullying that can cause severe emotional trauma that can last a lifetime. Body shaming often sounds like negative body talk, e.g. "too skinny", "too muscular" and can occur face-to-face, behind someone's back, or online.

Be kind, don't engage in and/or allow body shaming.

- Participating in and/or being exposed to 'weight talk' reinforces the message that a particular body (e.g. small body, low body fat percentage) is a valuable attribute.

Prioritise describing a person's body function over appearance.

- Sporting communities often believe that a specific body composition directly impacts sports performance, yet there is no research to support that changes in an athlete's body composition leads to improved performance.

Prioritise describing a person's body function over appearance.

- There are no truly "safe" words to describe another person's body without knowing their reaction to these words.

Prioritise describing a person's body function over appearance.

- It is crucial that all advice provided to athletes is evidence based and therefore this is best left to the professionals.

Always seek help from a qualified professional.

Guidelines

Do remember weight is not indicative of eating habits.

Diet culture perpetuates the idea that a larger body is a sign of poor eating habits and/or overeating and that eating less will always lead to weight loss, neither of which is true. An athlete with a weight that is considered “ideal” is more likely to be undereating.

Do remember that the body changes throughout the lifecycle

It is normal for everyone’s body to change during certain stages of their life (adolescence/young adults) seeing this as a symptom or an indication for a disease or disorder is not helpful.

Do evaluate why you are concerned about an athlete’s weight.

Check your own biases and evaluate if your concerns are valid.

If there are concerns about an athlete’s performance consider utilising the broader athlete support team (e.g. Medical Doctor, Clinical Psychologist or a NZ Registered Nutritionist/Dietitian, Clinical Physiologist or a Strength and Conditioning coach).

Be aware of body exposure in sporting attire.

Some uniforms are problematic - particularly those that are revealing, sexualised, tight and uncomfortable - essentially not ‘fit for purpose’ for the sport. Be aware that the rules around certain sports may limit athlete autonomy. If possible, include athletes voice in the design and colour of uniforms.

Do create policies around safe body monitoring and weighing.

Use a positive, person-oriented coaching style through which health and well-being, alongside performance, are prioritised, as well as adhering to appropriate body composition monitoring (appendix 3)

Do provide education for coaches, training staff, media, commentators and athlete performance support networks around language.

Coaches, support staff, parents and other influential individuals who can emphasise factors related to performance and generalised skill development and success in multiple domains of life, such as motivation, commitment, effort, teamwork and collaboration, instead of body appearance, weight, shape, or size.

When we hear language that promotes body dissatisfaction, have a private conversation with the athlete and guide them towards appropriate support.

Do ensure athletes have access to qualified professionals

e.g. NZ Registered Clinical Psychologist, NZ Registered Nutritionist/Dietitian and/or a Medical Doctor who can conduct annual screening to detect any potential medical or psychological risk factors that can be supported by early intervention.

Do openly communicate and discuss the importance of adequate fuelling, nutrition, and prevention of injury for optimal health, performance and well-being.

This helps to promote positive athlete development in general, including positive body image. For any matters related to nutrition for optimal health and performance access to a Registered Nutritionist/Dietitian is crucial.

Be aware of your bias towards different body shapes and sizes

This creates a culture within the sport environment that is positive and supportive of healthy attitudes toward all body shapes and sizes.

Do consider the phase of the periodised training cycle and/or injury

It is normal for everyone’s body to change during certain stages of athletic career (injury, off season, pregnancy, post-partum), seeing this as a symptom or an indication for a disease or disorder is not helpful as this will impact body dissatisfaction.

2. INTRODUCTION

“When I first started working with a Registered Nutritionist/Dietitian and they talked to me about fuelling for training and competition, I was worried eating that much would make me put on weight. By trusting the advice and meal plan I found I had more energy and trained better rather than putting on weight.”

“Coaches have been known to make comments about athletes’ weights to other athletes as we are often compared to each other. This made me feel sad and not valued for my achievements in sport.”

“When I was undereating and reached the weight suggested by my coach, my performances were amazing for 4 to 5 months. Then I crashed and I was tired and fatigued for months and couldn’t ride my bike. I wish I had sought professional help to determine my optimal race weight.”

Body image is a complex and dynamic interplay of thoughts, feelings, perceptions and sensations we experience in our bodies. It is influenced by internal factors (e.g. personality, direct and witnessed lived experiences, gender identity, sexual orientation, functionality) and external factors (e.g. school, training and sporting environment, messages from family, peers, culture about body-related expectations). Body image is flexible and changes over time, and an individual can experience positive body image, neutral body image and negative body image. It is important to note that positive body image is not on the same continuum as negative body image, nor should it be represented as low levels of negative body image (1; 2).

Concerns about appearance is commonplace among young people in Aotearoa. In Ngā Kōrero Hauora o Ngā Taiohi (3), almost half of the 500 young people surveyed (aged 12 - 24) chose “body image” as one of their biggest concerns, 82% of which identified as female.

While participation in sport provides many health benefits, there is evidence that a healthy body image can suffer through sports participation due to ingrained practices, biases and attitudes towards male and female athletic bodies (4). An athlete’s body image can be impacted by social expectations, the physical requirements of sport and the aesthetic expectations (5). In a survey of New Zealand female high-performance athletes, 73% (141/191) of the participants believed that elite sport participation was associated with pressure to have a specific physical appearance, and such pressure may be damaging to their overall health (6). This document aims to address these pressures to create a safer performance culture that celebrates body diversity.

Table 1: Examples of appearance and performance related pressures from elite NZ female athletes (6)

Source	Comment
Appearance related pressures in sport and damage to health	
Sport	The idea to look a certain way puts pressure on us female athletes around eating habits. For me, I had issues with body image in the past which led to dieting and in turn, influenced injury Some athletes have to diet very hard to make the weight which can have adverse impacts on their health, particularly when they are young and don't have enough support. We have people every day telling us how to be, what to do, how to look. This takes a toll on a person especially when your coach is male.
Performance related pressures	
Self	Often it is promoted that the leaner you are the better you'll perform. I feel there are pressures to look powerful, muscular and fit. The pressure to be fit enough and have enough energy to perform is huge. However, from a performance point of view this pressure is purely related to my physiological ability to compete. This pressure tends to emerge more when I feel self-conscious, or lack of confidence in my ability.
Social media	For distance runners seeing others in the media or social media might make people think they need to look like them in order to be fast.
Coach	Coach believes being light and slim relates to how fit and fast you are. Coach thinks you're not training if you are carrying weight.
Peers	There is the pressure of being lean and muscular, looking very toned, peers putting girls down if they are too big/not as strong. Indirect and direct comments about weight and appearance, snarky comments from female teammates about weight and image.

3. BLIND SPOTS

“As a coach I believed I had good intentions when I discussed an athlete’s physique as I believed it would improve their performance. When discussing this with a professional I realised my behaviours were quite harmful for the athlete.”

“As the manager of the team, I thought encouraging athletes to focus on their vegetables was beneficial for them. When discussing this with a performance nutritionist, I realised they might not be fuelling enough, and those comments were harmful.”

We all hold various blind spots or bias regarding size, weight and shape and how these contribute to performance and success. Many of our biases, are not empirically based but have developed over a lifetime through family beliefs, media influences and through our lived experience. Our bias, when left unchecked can unduly influence our behaviour and how we engage with others. This can lead to implicit and explicit behaviours that shape who succeeds and who does not. It can also lead to disordered eating, when an athlete is led to believe that they need to be a certain shape or weight to succeed in their sport and are told this by those in authority positions or have it implied through others behaviour they will often go to great lengths to achieve this.

Elite and world class performances require an openness to learn. No one can accurately know how their behaviour will influence others. We can, however, create environments where athletes and staff feel safe to voice concerns without repercussions. Time needs to be spent nurturing relationships and setting up expectations around communication and culture that meets the needs of everyone involved. It is crucial for everyone working in sport to identify their blind spots and resolve them. One way an individual can do this is to ask for direct feedback from people around them and through self-reflection.

Published NZ high performance research indicated that: (6)

54%

of the athletes believed there was pressure to conform to heteronormative notions of feminine appearance with sources of pressure identified from social media (80%), themselves (77%), general public (54%), and other media (53%).

22%

reported being told by their coach to lose weight for performance related reasons. Athletes reported that such comments made them feel unhappy with their body (73%), upset (45%), angry (32%), demotivated (27%), and confused (23%). Only four (18%) athletes reported being motivated by this information.

54%

of the athletes felt appearance-related pressures to look a certain way were more important than other performance-related pressures.

33%

of the athletes reported engaging in disordered eating practices to obtain a perceived ideal body. Those practices included dietary restriction (11%), training on rest days (7%), purging or vomiting (2%), or using laxatives (0.5%).

4. RISK FACTORS

There are factors which increase the risk of athletes developing negative thoughts and feelings towards their body (body dissatisfaction) (7). These risk factors for behaviours creating body dissatisfaction can be described as internal or external risk factors.

The internal factors contributing to body dissatisfaction include internalisation of a thin and ideal body, gendered constructs of bodies and body image, negative view of body changes, athlete driven bias, personality traits (perfectionism, low self-esteem and internalising pressure) and body image related knowledge (8). As these factors are individual to the athlete, they need to be addressed by the athlete's multi-disciplinary team, therefore these factors fall out of the scope of this document.

The external factors contributing to body dissatisfaction, include weight teasing and body shaming, inappropriate weight and body composition checks, pressure to meet sport specific body standards, cultural and societal pressures, bias of the wider sporting community, lack of qualified professional support (e.g. Clinical Psychologist, NZ Registered Dietitian/NZ Nutritionist or a Medical Doctor). Consideration of the phase of the periodised training cycle and/or injury to the athlete will impact on body dissatisfaction.

4.1 Weight teasing and body shaming

Athletes may face pressure to conform to certain body types, either directly or through teasing, competition, or comparisons. Fixating on physical appearance and/or weight can cause body dissatisfaction. Language that emphasises body weight (e.g., comments about "gaining weight" or "getting leaner") can perpetuate unhealthy body ideals and lead athletes to focus on appearance rather than performance.

4.2 Inappropriate weight and body composition checks

Different athletes thrive at different body compositions. Body composition refers to the percentage of fat, bone and muscle in the human body. The ideal body composition is likely to be influenced by an individual's unique physiology, consistent structured training, access to resources and support and responsiveness to training.

Research indicates that factors such as VO2 max, strength, power, speed and agility have shown far greater predictive value for success than body composition (9).

Therefore, excessive tracking and monitoring of weight and/or body composition e.g. body fat percentage and muscle mass, is inappropriate and is not a predictive value for success. Focussing on specific numbers can lead to athletes obsessing over their body appearance, feeling dissatisfied with their shape, and potentially engaging in unhealthy behaviours to achieve a certain look. These behaviours will negatively impact an athlete's health, wellbeing and performance.

4.3 Pressure to meet sports specific body standards

Some sports emphasise specific body types or appearance for optimal performance. For instance, athletes may face pressure to maintain a certain weight or body shape to meet the aesthetic or performance demands e.g. endurance athletes might face pressure to maintain low body weight, while strength athletes may be expected to develop muscle mass.

"Constantly seeing the coaches praise the skinny younger athletes that haven't gone through puberty yet mentally takes a toll on older athletes because we can't healthily look like the younger athletes, yet we are constantly compared to them."

Adolescents/young adults experience rapid physical change such as weight gain, muscle development, and changes in body shape which could lead to body dissatisfaction. Athletes specialising in a sport at an early age may experience increased pressure to meet the ideal standard or weight category for their sport. To be able to compete they might diet to manipulate their physique, increasing the risk of body dissatisfaction.

Body surveillance

4.4

Cultural and societal pressures

The media often promotes narrow ideals of beauty and athleticism which can lead to unrealistic expectations about how an athlete's body should look. This is particularly prominent in sports with a high degree of aesthetic or visual performance (e.g., gymnastics and swimming). Athletes may compare their bodies to others, especially if they feel they are not meeting these athletic cultural ideals. Social media and the constant sharing of filtered or edited images can exacerbate this tendency, leading to negative self-perception and dissatisfaction.

Body image in athletes can also vary according to the context, for example, athletic or social setting, coined as 'contextual body image' (10). Athletes can move between different body images depending on the setting, for example, female rugby players positively associated their body shape (strong, muscular) during matches as a tool for performance (athletic body image) (11). At the same time, they felt their athletic bodies failed to meet feminine beauty standards of western society (social body image). On the contrary, aesthetic and endurance athletes may experience more positive body image in daily life since their smaller and leaner bodies fit cultural ideals (12). Consequently, some athletes may be at less risk of body image concerns due to being more comparable to a societal ideal body image (13).

4.5

Bias

A bias is an implicit attitude, stereotype, motivation or assumption that can occur without one's knowledge, control or intention. Generally, this is the result of our life experiences and affects all types of people. Examples of bias include gender bias, weight bias, cultural bias, age bias, language and institutional bias.

When faced with situations or people, we use mental maps and patterns to classify them by making several automatic associations. Not surprisingly, these perceptions and assumptions based on these automatic associations may have unwanted repercussions. Part of learning about bias is realising that the brain can make assumptions and create mental shortcuts without us even being aware, for example, assuming that because a particular gold medallist is a certain size, all athletes need to be of similar size to succeed in that sport.

4.6

Lack of qualified professional support

Athletes may not always have access to a Medical Doctor, Clinical Psychologist or a NZ Registered Nutritionist/Dietitian. Without appropriate resources or an optimal support system, athletes may not have the tools or strategies to cope with body dissatisfaction, especially when it stems from performance pressures or environmental influences.

In some athletic cultures, there may be a stigma around discussing mental health or body image concerns. Athletes might fear that seeking help could be perceived as a weakness, leading them to suppress concerns about body dissatisfaction.

4.7

Phase of the periodised training cycle and/or injury

Athletes who are injured, in periods of rest after pinnacle events or athletes who are transitioning into retirement, may experience body dissatisfaction resulting from changes in muscle mass, weight, body composition, physical function or mobility. These changes can affect how athletes perceive their body, especially if they are unable to perform at their previous levels, which can reinforce body dissatisfaction.

Conclusion

1. Body dissatisfaction in athletes is influenced by a combination of factors related to their sport, environment, personality traits, and societal pressures.
2. It is crucial to understand these influences to be able to provide support that encourages a healthier, more positive relationship with the athletic body.
3. By fostering an environment that celebrates body diversity, psychological well-being, and performance-based goals, the risk of body dissatisfaction can be reduced and hopefully eliminated.

5. CREATING A SPORTING CULTURE THAT ENCOURAGES BODY DIVERSITY

“Coaches encouraging other athletes to focus on our skills makes me feel much better as I don’t feel judged on my appearance anymore”

“It’s so good that the selectors realise that optimal performance doesn’t correlate to one ‘ideal’ body shape”

“I am so happy with this new uniform as it now feels like the incredible things I can do with my body are more important than what I look like”

Enhancing body satisfaction in athletes is crucial for the health, wellbeing and performance of athletes. Body satisfaction refers to how athletes perceive and feel about their physical appearance and how this aligns with their goals, capabilities, and self-worth. When athletes experience positive body image, they are more likely to engage in healthy behaviours, maintain higher self-worth, and perform optimally. Reinforcing an athlete’s value beyond their sport or appearance helps them build a strong sense of self.

To nourish a performance culture that promotes the belief that all bodies are good bodies, everyone within the sporting community (coaches, support staff, management, athletes and their parents and/or caregivers), should be aware of the risk factors mentioned above and actively engage in behaviours that increase body satisfaction by following the guidelines provided at the end of the executive summary.

Everyone within the sporting community should focus on enhancing protective factors to foster a positive body image. For example, emphasise skill, effort, and performance rather than appearance. This promotes diversity, equity and inclusive behaviours and challenges bias related to body size/shape and performance.

Positive relationships between athletes, coaches, managers, support staff, parents/caregivers and/or teammates who reinforce self-worth and discourage body comparisons, create a protective social environment. Exposure to successful athletes with various body types and backgrounds can reinforce the idea that excellence comes in many forms.

Language is critical when creating a safe and supportive sporting culture that doesn’t overvalue appearance. Helpful language builds confidence, resilience, and fosters a performance culture that is committed to the enhancement and management of a positive body image. Unhelpful language can create anxiety and reduce self-esteem, potentially harming an individual and team culture.

Figure 1.0 Athletes with different body types and physiques excel in different types of sports. Performance does not correlate to a single “ideal” body (14)

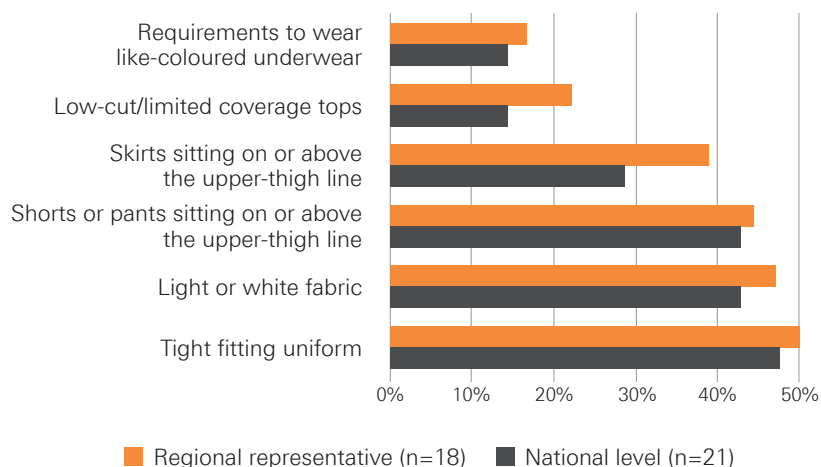
It is everyone’s responsibility to recognise language that promotes body dissatisfaction

It is everyone’s right to be spoken to without critiquing or commenting on one’s physical appearance



Lastly, the colour and design of a sports uniform (tightness and cut of a garment) can have a significant impact on their body image. When an athlete is required to wear a tight/form fitting uniform that exposes the shape of their body, a reduction in comfort and positive body image can arise. This was highlighted by the German gymnastics team who wore unitards at the Olympics and the Norwegian Beach Handball Team who protested wearing skimpy bikinis, which ultimately resulted in a uniform rule change for the sport (5; 15).

Figure 2: Frequency of design attributes associated with sport uniforms across surveyed National Sporting Organisations in NZ (16)



The above table shows that certain design attributes of uniforms can be perceived as problematic, particularly those uniforms that are revealing, sexualised, tight and uncomfortable. Whilst the decision process around the uniform design and colour are issued by the associated facilitating organisation (e.g. school, sports club, event organising committee or national/international sporting body) make sure this design process is athlete led and always include athlete consultation as well as feedback from the athletes.

Steps to create positive sporting culture:

1. Conduct annual screening by a Medical Doctor, Clinical Psychologist and/or NZ Registered Nutritionist / Dietitian with all athletes to detect any potential medical or psychological risk factors that can be supported by early intervention.
2. Facilitate athletes' access to a Registered Nutritionist/Dietitian for any matters related to nutrition for optimal health and sport performance.
3. Openly communicate and discuss with athletes about the importance of adequate fuelling, nutrition, and prevention of injury for optimal health, performance and well-being. The following factors can help promote positive athlete development in general, including positive body image:
 - Encourage help-seeking for all mental health concerns, including disordered eating and eating disorders.
 - Foster a positive, person-oriented coaching style through which health and well-being, alongside performance, are prioritized.
 - Build a culture within the sport environment that is positive and supportive of healthy attitudes toward all body shapes and sizes.
 - Coaches, support staff, parents and other influential individuals who emphasize factors related to performance and generalized skill development and success in multiple domains of life, such as motivation, commitment, effort, teamwork and collaboration, instead of body appearance, weight, shape, or size
 - Reducing body exposure in sporting attire and/or including athletes when discussion uniform options.
 - Whenever possible consider athlete consultation and including the athletes voice into any discussion regarding the design and colour of the uniform.

6. THE IMPACT OF LANGUAGE

When having discussions with athletes, language and commentary around nutrition and physique should focus on performance success factors (e.g. completing training, recovery, fuelling, and performance improvements) rather than weight and/or size.

Language must be inclusive and respectful, avoiding any form of discrimination. Significant effort should be made to avoid critiquing or commenting on the body weight, shape, or size of an athlete, regardless of whether the intent of the message is to be “positive” or “helpful”.

Language can enhance mana, uplifts the dignity and respect of individuals, as well as impact health, well-being and performance. Some inclusive language examples include:

“Did you remember to bring a snack to have between/after sessions?”

“It is great to see you fuelling for the work that you are doing.”

“Strong legs will make you bike faster.”

All communication and language need to be thoughtful, respectful and culturally appropriate. Athletes have unique backgrounds and personalities which influence how they will receive and interpret the messages differently.

When discussing athletes’ bodies, it’s essential to do so with sensitivity, respect, and an understanding of the context. Athletes’ physical forms are often shaped by their specific sports, training regimens, and natural body types, and the focus should be on their functionality and performance rather than purely aesthetic qualities.

6.1

Focus on functionality

Focus on how the athlete’s body contributes to their athletic performance. Avoid framing the conversation in terms of beauty standards or subjective preference.

Instead of commenting on an athlete’s appearance:

“Wow, athlete X legs are huge.”

Say:

“Sprinters often develop strong leg muscles for explosive power.”

Or:

“Your technique has improved and optimised your efficiency in the water.”

6.2

Acknowledge there is not one type of athlete body

Acknowledge athletes come in all shapes and sizes, which often reflect the demands of their sport and genetics. Aim to avoid generalisations or suggesting there’s one “ideal” athletic body. Consider how cultural contexts influence discussions about bodies. What’s considered an “athletic” body varies widely across cultures and sports.

For example, the Gold Medal winning NZ men’s rowing double scull were much shorter than their competitors at the London Olympics.



6.3

Aim to use neutral and respectful terminology

Be mindful of language and aim to avoid language that could be interpreted as judgmental or objectifying.

Instead of:

"Athlete X is very bulky."

Say:

"Athlete X's hard work and dedication to training has paid off in their strength and power testing"

6.4

Focus on training and skill, rather than aesthetics

Support staff, managers, parents and coaches are encouraged to recognise effort and skill. Assure that the hard work, dedication, and skill that go into achieving their level of physical fitness is emphasised, instead of focusing on how the athlete looks.

Instead of:

"Athlete X looks skinny."

Say:

"Elite athletes may have more muscle mass and less body fat than sub elite athletes in some sports, but this may simply be a byproduct of their persistent and periodised training."

6.5

Mind your food comments

A positive relationship with food is helpful for our health, wellbeing and performance. Support staff, managers, parents and coaches should be mindful of judgemental or negative comments about specific foods or suggesting fasting or fad diets as athletes can be influenced by what is said.

Instead of:

"That food contains too much added sugar and is very bad for us."

Say:

"Sugar provides your body with energy to train/compete."

6.6

Consider gender bias

When describing someone's physique ensure that you do this respectfully no matter the sex, gender, race, colour etc. Be aware of how coaches, parents and support staff differ in their conversation when they talk about male versus female athletes. It is not uncommon for commentary on women's bodies to skew toward aesthetics, while men's bodies are described in terms of strength and ability.

6.7

Context is key

Context is key and there is a need to ensure that everyone in the athlete's performance environment tailors the conversation to the purpose. If discussing an athlete's fitness in relation to their sport, focus on what is relevant to their performance.

When in doubt, ask yourself:

"Would this comment feel respectful and empowering if said to the athlete directly?"

Summary

1. Any terminology that relates to body shaming or language that is disrespectful of any body type should not be used in the sport environment, including directly to or about an athlete (e.g., "fat", "overweight", "large", "heavy", "skinny", or "stick thin", etc.). Even apparently simple comments or certain word choices can have an impact on creating a culture that contributes to negative body image.
2. Rather than praise or criticism for body appearance, weight, shape, or size, use language that focuses on performance, skill execution, power, strength, fitness, and other attributes that are not appearance-based (e.g., teamwork, leadership, persistence).
3. Avoid conversations with coaches, staff, and other athletes about the bodies or eating habits of athletes or staff, particularly in front of athletes. If such conversations are necessary for performance, well-being, or other health related reasons they should be handled sensitively and privately with the involvement of an appropriate health professional.

	Examples of what it is	Examples of what it isn't
Focus on functionality /health	"Let's discuss how you can better reach your strength goals" Everyone's needs are different, so we need to make sure you're having the right conversations with XX"	"You should look to track xx" "If you want to be faster, you'll need to lose weight" "You're carrying too much weight/ you're too weak/small" "You shouldn't be eating XX" "You shouldn't be wearing XX" "You should eat X to lose weight"
Promote body positivity and acceptance	"Everyone's body is different; what's important is how you feel and move in the pool" "There is no universal body shape of an athlete"	"You don't have the right build for a top-level athlete"
Avoid comparisons		"We need more athletes like XX" "X tried this, and it made them a lot faster" "My star athlete is XX"
Provide constructive and specific feedback (process/behaviour focused)	"Your hard work in training has really improved your *stroke/technique* in the pool/ on the track/on water"	
Strengths based/mana enhancing over fear based	"Let's reflect on what we can learn from this, and I am confident you will bounce back stronger next time"	

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