



Australian Government



VOLUNTARY
INDUSTRY CODE
OF CONDUCT ON
**BODY
IMAGE**

INTRODUCTION

The fashion, media and advertising industries play a significant role in shaping the cultural ideals of society. Messages about beauty portrayed in popular media can contribute to body image pressures on young people in particular.

The National Advisory Group on Body Image, appointed by the Australian Government in 2009, developed the Voluntary Industry Code of Conduct to provide national guidance on this important issue. The Code aims to build on and further encourage the positive steps that are being taken within the fashion, media and advertising industries to bring about long-term cultural change.

The Code outlines Principles to guide industries to adopt more body image friendly practices. It encourages more diversity in the selection of models, a wider range of clothing sizes in retail fashion, the use of realistic and natural images of people, and disclosure when images have been digitally manipulated.

It is an important call to action – asking industry professionals to move beyond a ‘business as usual’ approach and to be open and innovative in considering how the Code’s principles can be applied in their work. Some Principles may be of more relevance for particular industries than others or in certain contexts.

For further details regarding the National Advisory Group on Body Image and Australian Government initiatives on body image please visit www.youth.gov.au/bodyimage.html



VOLUNTARY INDUSTRY CODE OF CONDUCT

1. Positive content and messaging

Use positive content and messaging to support the development of a positive body image and realistic and healthy physical goals and aspirations among consumers.

2. Diversity

Use a diverse range of people that are appropriate to their target audience. When considering diversity, particular focus should be given to including a range of body shapes, sizes and ethnicities.

3. Fair placement

Use advertising that supports positive and healthy body image behaviour. Advertising that contradicts positive body image messages will not be used.

4. Realistic and natural images of people

Do not use digital technology in a way that alters images of people so that their body shape and features are unrealistic or unattainable through healthy practices.

Make consumers aware of the extent to which images of people have been manipulated.

5. Healthy weight models

Use models that are clearly of a healthy weight.

6. Appropriate modelling age

Only use people aged 16 years or older to model adult clothes or to work or model in fashion shows targeting an adult audience.

7. Fashion retailers supporting positive body image

Stock a wide variety of sizes that reflects demand from customers.

GUIDANCE FOR GOOD PRACTICE PRINCIPLES



This section provides guidance for organisations wishing to support the Code of Conduct on how to apply the Good Practice Principles of the Voluntary Industry Code of Conduct.

Principle: **Positive content and messaging**

The use of healthy models and positive body image messages more broadly, can result in people feeling less pressure to attain unrealistic cultural ideals of beauty, and instead help them to develop positive body image and realistic and healthy physical goals and aspirations.

When seeking to demonstrate good practice in positive content and messaging, organisations are encouraged to:

- show a diverse range of body images that represent a diverse view of beauty.
- communicate the importance of being healthy above body shape.
- communicate the holistic value of people, above physical characteristics.

Principle: **Diversity**

Broadening our cultural ideals of beauty by using a more diverse range of people within the fashion, advertising and media industries will allow more people to identify with popular images of beauty and help them view their own bodies more positively.

When seeking to demonstrate good practice in diversity, organisations are encouraged to use a wide range of body shapes, sizes and ethnicities that are appropriate to the audience that a message or product is targeting.

Principle: **Healthy weight models**

Modelling implicitly seeks to set an example towards which others might aspire and, in choosing a model, organisations can be seen to put that person, including their body shape, forward as an aspirational ideal. In this way the use of models who are very thin (or male models who are excessively muscular) contributes to a beauty ideal within popular culture that can play a causal role in the development of negative body image for some people.

When seeking to demonstrate good practice in their choice of models, organisations are encouraged to use models who are a healthy weight and shape.

For further guidance on what is considered a healthy weight, organisations are encouraged to refer to health information available at websites such as www.healthyactive.gov.au/healthyweight and www.nhmrc.gov.au and to consult with expert health practitioners.

All organisations are encouraged to consider the health and wellbeing of models. Where there is concern about the healthy weight of a model, organisations are encouraged to take steps to satisfy themselves the model is healthy before employing them.

Principle: **Fashion retailers supporting positive body image**

As distributors of fashion products directly to the public, fashion retailers have a unique opportunity to promote positive body image messages in a way that responds to the immediate needs of consumers.

Retail organisations that wish to support positive body image are encouraged to stock clothing in a wide variety of sizes that reflect the demand from customers..

Principle: **Fair placement**

People who are most vulnerable to negative body image messages are likely to be drawn to editorial content that discusses body image issues.

Fair placement encourages organisations to ensure the messages in advertising do not contradict the positive body image messages that may be presented in editorial content. Organisations are encouraged to follow body image editorial content with advertising that uses consistently positive messaging.

More specifically, organisations that support good practice in fair placement are encouraged to refrain from following body image editorial content with advertising for products or messages that are concerned with:

- rapid weight loss.
- cosmetic surgery that is not medically necessary.
- excessive exercise.
- promoting negative body image or are in direct conflict with positive body image messages.

Principle: **Appropriate modelling age**

Fashion shows, particularly the backstage of catwalks, are often an adult environment and it is possible that children who are in these environments will be exposed to situations that are inappropriate and for which they are ill-equipped.

The growing tendency to use young models whose bodies conform to thin ideals that are often impossible for adult models to attain through healthy behaviours is of concern. This practice is seen as contributing to unhealthy ideals and can encourage unhealthy weight management practices, including by other models.

Organisations that seek to support good practice in the principle of modelling age are encouraged to only:

- employ people aged 16 years or older to work or model in adult catwalk shows.
- use models aged 16 years or older to model adult clothes.

Principle: **Realistic and natural images of people**

The use of digitally-enhanced images is widespread across many aspects of the fashion, media and advertising industries and is a vehicle for visual expression.

However, this type of technology can also be used to alter images of people so that their body shape and features are no longer realistic or attainable through healthy practices.

When using technology to digitally alter images of people, organisations that support good practice in the use of realistic and natural images of people are encouraged to:

- refrain from enhancing images in a way that changes a person's body shape, for example by lengthening a person's legs, tightening their waist or changing his or her body size.
- refrain from removing moles, freckles and other permanent distinguishing marks.
- ensure skin tones remain natural and refrain from smoothing over creases and lines.
- ensure that where alterations are made to an image of a person (for example to enhance hair or eye colours) it results in the image remaining as close to natural as possible and not resulting in a significant change to the image (except where the intent is to produce an image that is not realistic).
- disclose images that have been retouched.

Digital enhancement also provides opportunities to make consumers aware of the unrealistic nature of some images of people. Where organisations wish to further demonstrate good practice in this area they are encouraged to develop the media literacy of their consumers by making them aware of the extent to which images have been manipulated within a publication and work that goes into taking professional photographs of models.