

# HOW TO TALK ABOUT BODIES IN SPORT: TOP TIPS FOR COACHES



Physical activity and sport can improve body image, and yet eating disorders and other body image related conditions are much higher in current and former athletes than in other populations. Here's how you can make some small changes to your language to protect and encourage the young people in your team or club.

1. **Reframe comments about appearance-** Making comments about how bodies look - either positive or negative- can have a powerful negative impact on the people you coach. Try to start noticing when you go to make a comment about appearance, and reframe to ensure that your message is about performance instead. Rather than commenting on the fact that athletes look 'fit' you could ask if athletes are feeling strong, mentally focussed, motivated, or powerful.
2. **Remember that bodies change in adolescence-** Commenting on and focusing on pubertal development and changes is unlikely to be helpful. Many of the triggering comments that athletes report receiving were due to the natural, hormonally driven changes to their bodies during puberty. Young people are often insecure about these physical changes- it's best not to comment on them.
3. **Shame doesn't motivate behaviour-** When we make people feel bad about something, particularly in relation to bodies, it might lead to changes in their behaviour for a day or two, but rarely results in long term behaviour change or benefit.
4. **Focus on health and performance, not weight-** Appearance is a poor indicator of health. Some people can look very fit, but be very medically or mentally unwell. If we want people to be healthy, let's support their health behaviours- fuelling the body, training, and resting. Focus on removing the barriers to accessing
5. **Call out and cut down on body shaming-** If you are committed to making these changes yourself, the best way to ensure a strong impact is for you to reinforce this within the team. Work with your athletes to ensure that they understand how damaging body shaming can be, and set standards and guidelines for how your athletes speak to each other.

Consider learning more about this- there are courses and resources available.

These guidelines are based on the Body Confident Collective Sport Guidelines by Dr Georgie Buckley. Access the full guidelines document here:  
<https://www.bodyconfidentcollective.org/sport-guidelines>