own it

body liberation microlearning with young people

BODY LIBERATION

EDITORIAL INFO

Title: Own It, Body Liberation Microlearning with young people.

Authors: Aga Byrczek, Kamila Lenczewska, Ieva Miltina

Graphic Design: Arabella Sansegundo Mulero

Proofreading: Arabella Sansegundo Mulero and Aga Byrczek

TRIGGER WARNING ❗

In our communication, we use the word "fat" as a neutral descriptive term without any shaming or offending intention, neither it seems discriminatory towards different body sizes. By normalizing this word, we can take away the power from those who use it to hurt others.

This manual discusses sensitive issues related to body size, weight, and mental health. Some content may be triggering or distressing to certain readers. If you are struggling with any of these topics, consider seeking support from a qualified professional.

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Content Table

Introduction

In recent years, body shape and size have received increased attention as social factors that significantly impact the l ivelihood and well-being of both young and adult individuals. If we look inwards, most of us can recall moments when we felt shamed for our natural bodies. This feeling of insufficiency leads us towards deeer reflection, where we often realise that these ideas have been externally imposed and subsequently internalised. So, how can we, as youth workers, activists, educators, and simply curious individuals, break these barriers, understand their roots, and create an environment that allows others to lean into their authentic selves, fostering a more wholesome life experience?

As representatives of the Body Liberation Network, this manual is one of the first steps towards answering these questions. In working towards the liberation of our own bodies, we have embarked on a quest to develop resources that offer support and lay the foundations for more inclusive youth work — and, ultimately, a much more inclusive Europe.

We recognise the importance of the language used throughout this publication, aiming to provide inclusive and non-stigmatising language that aligns with our values. Wherever possible, we use the word fat as a neutral descriptor

— reclaimed by many as an empowering term. The word obesity appears only where strictly necessary, such as when referencing research or medical discourse, and is marked in italics to signal its specific usage.

This term is heavily associated with medicalised narratives of unhealthiness, which often contribute to stigma, discrimination, and harmful weight loss behaviours. It also gives the false impression that body size is solely the result of personal behaviour and entirely within an individual's control. By using intentional lan-guage, we hope to support a shift towards a more compassionate, accurate, and affirming conversation about bodies.

About this manual

This is the first part of the Erasmus+ funded project "Microlearning for Body Liberation". It was inspired by social media interactivity, resonating with our curiosity for exploration and leading to the creation of a resource pack for anyone interested in working with body liberation in Europe.

The manual is designed to be a useful tool for those who wish to develop more inclusive youth work practices, or for those looking to begin work on topics related to body shape and size discrimination — whether at an individual or systemic level. While much of the manual focuses on size and weight inclusion, we encourage you to approach the content from your own experience — have any of your bodily attributes ever felt at odds with mainstream media narratives or societal expectations?

In the following pages, you will find information and theory supporting our claims, demonstrating why the world could be a better place with body liberation principles in place. You will learn about the concept of Body Liberation and how it could be applied to youth work through microactivism, microlearning in digital spaces, and other approaches. We would particularly like to highlight the Body Liberation Glossary and some of the non-formal education methods included, which should be especially useful for those new to the topic. Finally, feel free to explore our online media collection based on the theme, and help the community spread the word through your networks.

#BodyLiberationEU — a goal we all benefit from!

Part 1: Understanding Body Liberation

Choosing a descriptive term for the relationship with our bodies was both a challenging and transformative task. As a collective, we aimed to go beyond a focus solely on weight, despite our origins in fatphobia activism. The term needed to speak to a wide range of people and acknowledge systemic oppression. Other terms, such as Body Positivity or Body Acceptance, felt inaccurate. Self-love does not shield individuals from experiencing discrimination. In this sense, suggesting that self-love alone can solve struggles tied to systemic issues places the responsibility solely on individuals. Without the right tools, self-love on its own can be the wrong approach to deeper triggers and may even harm mental health and well-being. Body Liberation deeply resonates with the whole concept we are seeking to communicate.

Defining Body Liberation

We define **Body Liberation** as freedom from social and political systems of oppression that designate certain bodies as more worthy, healthy, and desirable than others. This concept shifts the focus away from individual responsibility towards dismantling the systemic structures that perpetuate harm. Chrissy King, an author in this field, encapsulates the essence of body liberation:

"We choose body liberation. We choose freedom. Freedom from obsessive thoughts about changing or manipulating ourselves to fit into societal standards of beauty. Freedom from obsessive thoughts about every morsel of food you eat. Freedom from expectations — other people's and our own. Freedom to disavow diet culture, toxic fitness culture, and systemic oppression that wants to keep us at war with ourselves. Freedom to feel comfortable in your body in all its iterations. Freedom to enjoy and savor food and truly be present in our experiences. Freedom to embrace and actually love the person that you are. Freedom to always remember that this body we reside in is just a shell that allows us to have a human experience. Freedom to examine and process our own internalised fatphobia. Freedom to make decisions about our bodies for ourselves, free of external influences and conditioning. Freedom to feel bad about whatever we want and remember that we deserve the same grace, self-compassion, and kindness that we show everyone else. Freedom to reclaim our time and our bodies. Freedom to unapologetically take up as much space as you want."

— Chrissy King, The Body Liberation Project

This quote invites us to envision a world where individuals are free to exist without the constraints imposed by societal norms and expectations. While many aspects of body liberation are not yet officially recognised as forms of discrimination, pursuing this ideal brings us closer to a more equitable world.
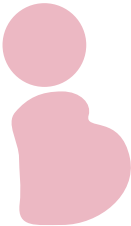
Target Groups

Unrealistic beauty standards propagated by the beauty industry affect everyone, but the consequences are not evenly distributed. Our work seeks to identify and address the experiences of specific groups disproportionately affected by body-based discrimination:

Fat folx: Individuals who, based on clothing measurements, fall into categories beyond straight sizes.

People who consider themselves fat: Those who identify as fat due to societal standards but fit into straight-size categories. While they face challenges, their experiences differ from those of fat folx.
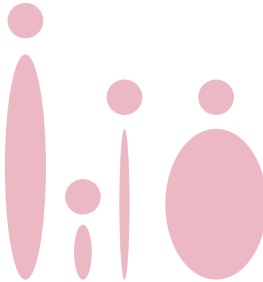
People with visible disabilities: face compounded stigma related to their bodies.

Postpartum mothers: Navigating societal expectations around "bouncing back" after pregnancy and too much pressure not gain too much wight during pregnancy.

People far from the average: Individuals considered "too tall," "too short," "too thin," or "too fat."

Queer and trans individuals: Facing judgement for gender expression or presentation.

Youth not fitting beauty standards: Those perceived as too young, too childish, or not conforming to gendered expectations.

This list is not exhaustive, as many people experience body-based discrimination. It is important not to dismiss aspects such as age, baldness, or even clothing choices — all of which may form as part of a person's identity. These differences often distance individuals from rigid beauty standards, placing them in a more vulnerable position and exposing them to bullying, microaggressions, and discrimination.

An Important Perspective

Body perception is largely shaped by shifting frames.

The beauty industry capitalises on this, selling products and procedures — from skin-lighteing creams to hair transplants — which promise transformation. This industry perpetuates the belief that life must be put on hold until one becomes slimmer, prettier, or otherwise more acceptable.

Body liberation challenges this narrative. We believe that all people deserve to live their lives to the fullest, in the bodies they have right now. Life should not be paused in pursuit of an ideal that may never be reached.

As Chrissy King writes:

"Obsessing about food and exercise was really exhausting, and I eventually realized that if I didn't change something, I would always be unhappy with myself, regardless of how thin I got."

Body liberation is about reclaiming joy and embracing life in the present moment. By dismantling systemic oppression and challenging social norms, we create space for everyone to thrive.

Fat Folx

Sub-Groups

When we talk about fatness, we understand it in two ways: as a measurable body size — often based on clothing sizes — and as a personal feeling of not fitting into society's unrealistic beauty standards. Both are valid, but the way people experience being fat can vary greatly depending on how far their body is from what is considered "acceptable".

For example, someone who wears a smaller plus size might still be able to find clothes in regular stores and face more subtle forms of body shaming, such as being told they would look great "if they just lost a bit of weight". On the other hand, people in larger bodies often struggle to find clothes that fit at all, face direct insults, or even experience harassment in public spaces.

For a clearer understanding of these differences, fat-positive communities often use terms like small fat, mid-fat, superfat, and infinifat. These labels help to highlight that not all fat people experience the world in the same way — those closer to thinness often have more access and face less harm. It is also worth kindly reminding that body-based discrimination is not solely about size.

To better describe these differences, fat-positive communities use terms like:

Small fat:
typically wear sizes up to 18 (1X–2X); can often shop in some mainstream stores.

Mid- fat:
usually wear sizes 20–24 (2X–3X); limited access to mainstream brands, rely more on plus-size retailers.

Infinifat:
size 34 and above (6X+); face extreme limitations for clothing access and often require custom - made clothing.

Superfat:
wear sizes 26–32 (4X–5X); mostly shop online, with limited options even in plus-size sections.

These terms help identifying the impact of proximity to thinner sizes and the different kinds of discrimination individuals face — where choice itself becomes a privilege.

Aubrey Gordon. What We Don' t Talk About When We Talk About Fat (pp. 9-10). Edición de Kindle.

Part 2: Why Working Against
Weight Stigma Achieves **Body Liberation**?

To understand why body liberation could be so crucial for the world as an end goal, we need to look into what kind of harm is caused by body shape and size discrimination, body shaming, as well as weight stigma. Therefore, this section will be explaining briefly, how well-being and self-expression in young people have an impact on their development. We will be highlighting the most common issues addressed to accessibility and inclusion, as well as consequences on physical and mental health. Last but not least, a chunk of this section is dedicated to providing youth work-specific insights. We should bear in mind that the data is geographically specific, presented to illustrate patterns rather than being strictly defined by statistics in the European context.

Broader issues regarding the inclusion of diverse bodies can be explained by a number of systemic shortcomings. While youth work appears to be hands-on, looking at the bigger picture, it's required

to tackle these issues more effectively. Among activists, we often mention terms like **oppression** - prolonged, cruel, unjust treatment or the **exercise of authority**[1] It is undeniable that there is injustice towards bodies that do not fit certain societal standards — injustice that is often cruel, even when not officially recognised. In the context of body shape and size, we also work with particular terms like ageism, lookism, sizeism, healthism, and weight bias (or fatphobia). You can learn more about each of these terms in the Glossary pg 36 , however, they all refer to interconnected forms of discrimination and prejudice based on aspects of the body (like age, size, looks, health, and weight). By all means, certain types of bodies are considered to be more worthy than others. The primary focus of the following paragraphs will be weight bias and sizeism, but when reading, please consider **intersectionality**[2]- body shaming and discrimination can occur in many similar and overlapping contexts.

Stereotypes and exclusion

It unfolds in the daily lives of both - those with bodies that do not fit the "norm" as well as through cultivating fear of those in "normative" bodies for the possibility of becoming marginalized for these reasons. Through widespread narratives and imagery, certain bodies are portrayed as more desirable, capable, or worthy, while others are stigmatised as lazy, unhealthy, or unattractive[3]. Such stereotypes, whether consciously or unconsciously, reinforce exclusion within education, the workplace, and social life. According to the WHO, school-aged children with obesity are 63% more likely to be bullied; 54% of adults with

[1] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/oppression
[2] interconnectedness of social categories, all of which shape an individual's experiences and opportunities.
[3] Aparicio-Martinez, P., Perea-Moreno, A. J., Martinez-Jimenez, M. P., Redel-Macías, M. D., Pagliari, C., & Vaquero-Abellan, M. (2019). Social media, thin-ideal, body dissatisfaction and disordered eating attitudes: An exploratory analysis. International journal of environmental research and public health, 16(21), 4177.

obesity report experiencing stigma from co-workers, and 69% report facing stigma from healthcare professionals[4]. Meanwhile, explicit bullying and harassment are common but are often overlooked in discussions about body shape and size. Indeed, weight bias and stigma are still frequently regarded as socially acceptable forms of discrimination[5].

Barriers for medical care

Yet another area with alarming levels of discrimination is the medical field. Individuals with higher weight often receive lower-quality medical care. Due to weight bias among medical staff, they are more likely to be misdiagnosed (including missed diagnoses of eating disorders) or to receive inadequate or delayed treatment. Outside the EU, statistics indicate that up to two-thirds of patients with higher weight have experienced stigmatisation by *medical staff*[6].

Regardless of size or shape, weight stigma and body shaming pose risks to health and delay access to preventive medical care across all age groups. Anticipating that a doctor will attribute every complaint to weight reduces the likelihood of individuals seeking *medical help*[7], decreases levels of physical activity, and increaes feelings of *shame about exercising in public*[8]. In the long term, this also contributes to increased mortality risk, both through stress-related health conditions resulting from internalised shame and anxiety due to societal *body shaming*[9], and through delayed access to medical care.

Educational settings challenges

In the context of young people, it is important to examine rates of bullying and exclusion specifically within educational settings and among peers. Numerous studies highlight that students with higher body weight experience greater levels of injustice. A multi-national study also found that weight-based bullying is one of the most common forms of *harassment in schools*[10]. Even preschoolers often associate negative attributes and stereotypes with peers who have *larger bodies*[11]. Such findings have been reported by adolescents, their parents, and teachers across a range of *research contexts*[12]. In conclusion, this teasing and bullying can lead to social isolation and interfere with students' *academic performance*[13]. Research indicates that teenagers with higher body weight are less likely to be selected as friends and are more likely to experience *exclusion*[14]. This isolation can damage social bonds and make it harder for them to succeed academically. Many students report that bullying negatively affects their grades and causes them to skip school to avoid being *teased*[15].

[4] *World Health Organization. (2017). Weight bias and obesity stigma: considerations for the WHO European Region (No. WHO/EURO: 2017-5369-45134-64401). World Health Organization. Regional Office for Europe.*

[5] *Puhl, R. M., & Brownell, K. D. (2003). Psychosocial origins of obesity stigma: toward changing a powerful and pervasive bias. Obesity reviews, 4(4), 213-227.*

[6] *(Puhl et al., 2021)*

[7] *Tomiyama, A. J. (2014). Weight stigma is stressful. A review of evidence for the Cyclic Obesity/Weight-Based Stigma model. Appetite, 82, 8-15.*

[8] *Vartanian, L. R., & Novak, S. A. (2011). Internalized societal attitudes moderate the impact of weight stigma on avoidance of exercise. Obesity, 19(4), 757-762.*

[9] *Sutin, A. R., Stephan, Y., & Terracciano, A. (2015). Weight discrimination and risk of mortality. Psychological science, 26(11), 1803-1811.*

[10] *Puhl RM, Latner JD, O'Brien K, Luedicke J, Forhan M, Danielsdottir S. Crossnational perspectives about weight based bullying in youth: nature, extent and remedies. Pediatr Obes. 2015;11(4):241–250*

[11] *Spiel EC, Paxton SJ, Yager Z. Weight attitudes in 3 to 5 year old children: age differences and cross sectional predictors. Body Image. 2012;9(4):524–527 AND Su W, Di Santo A. Preschool children's perceptions of overweight peers. J Early Child Res. 2012;10(1):19–31*

[12] *Pont, S. J., Puhl, R., Cook, S. R., & Slusser, W. (2017). Stigma experienced by children and adolescents with obesity. Pediatrics, 140(6).*

[13] *Quick VM, McWilliams R, Byrd Bredbenner C. Fatty, fatty, two by four: weight teasing history and disturbed eating in young adult women. Am J Public Health. 2013;103(3):508–515*

[14] *Goldfield G, Moore C, Henderson K, Buchholz A, Obeid N, Flament M. The relation between weight based teasing and psychological adjustment in adolescents. Paediatr Child Health. 2010;15(5):283–288*

[15] *Puhl RM, Leudick J. Weightbased victimization among adolescents in the school setting: emotional reactions and coping behaviors. J Youth Adolesc. 2012;41(1):27–40*

Young people are particularly vulnerable to harmful narratives conveyed through the media. Such bias in the public eye is perpetuated through two main forms — imagery and language. Many children's television programmes and films reinforce stereotypes, often portraying slim characters as kind and popular, while depicting larger characters as mean, unhealthy, or the subject of *ridicule*[16]. Studies show that 70% of recent children's films contain weight-based stigmatising content, with most targeting characters with *obesity*[17]. Youth-oriented television programmes also feature more weight-stigmatising content than those aimed at *general audiences*[18]. In addition, advertisements by companies excessively promote certain beauty ideals, with such imagery being ever-present and highly visible to children from an early age.

relatable body types, shapes, and sizes not only creates an unhealthy image of what human bodies are like but also fosters unrealistic expectations among young people regarding their bodies.

Falling into the false illusion that reminding a person to work harder on their body will help them is one of the most common misconceptions. In reality, such actions often have the opposite effect. During adolescence, receiving comments or being teased about weight can lead to weight gain and increase the likelihood of overweight in adulthood, creating a harmful cycle in which weight gain raises the risk of further teasing and *bullying*[19]. Moreover, individuals considered to have a body weight above the norm are three times less

Harmful Narratives and Lack of Representation

likely to lose excess weight if they experience *weight stigma*[20]. Following the narrative that certain bodies

Only recently have popular media and culture become more open to portraying a broader diversity of bodies — including plus-size models, narratives challenging normative bodies, and the body positivity movement as a whole. However, such representations remain the exception. As adolescents spend hours each day consuming media, these negative portrayals can shape their perceptions, making them more likely to express weight bias towards their peers. The lack of representation of diverse and

are better than others, the information circulated about the obesity epidemic, diets, and various aesthetic procedures — from minor to particularly *invasive*[21] — shapes body perception itself, framing it as something in constant need of improvement. There is comparatively little information available on concepts such as Health at *Every Size*[22] and body neutrality, which promote a more authentic and human existence in all bodies.

Accessibity issues

In addition to harmful attitudes, people of different sizes and shapes also face a widespread lack of access to spaces and everyday items. Most commonly, this is experienced through unsuitable equipment — such as the size and durability of seating, medical apparatus, and restrooms — and limited clothing options, with restrictions in both sizes and available designs, or overall accessibility. Standardised solutions have failed to accommodate the needs of diverse bodies, and encountering such tangible shortcomings on a daily basis not only creates barriers to participation in public life but also further delays the development of a sense of belonging.

[16] Robinson T, Callister M, Jankoski T. Portrayal of body weight on children's television sitcoms: a content analysis. Body Image. 2008;5(2):141–151

[17] Throop EM, Skinner AC, Perrin AJ, Steiner MJ, Odulana A, Perrin EM. Pass the popcorn: "obesogenic" behaviors and stigma in children's movies. Obesity (Silver Spring). 2014;22(7):1694–1700

[18] Eisenberg ME, CarlsonMcGuire A, Gollust SE, NeumarkSztainer D. A content analysis of weight stigmatization in popular television programming for adolescents. Int J Eat Disord. 2015;48(6):759–766

[19] Pont, S. J., Puhl, R., Cook, S. R., & Slusser, W. (2017). Stigma experienced by children and adolescents with obesity. Pediatrics, 140(6).

[20] Sutin, A. R., & Terracciano, A. (2013). Perceived weight discrimination and obesity. PloS one, 8(7), e70048.

[21] Due to limited space in this manual we will not discuss this in much detail, but many body liberation and fat activists broadly expose the ways how such narratives feed the harmful bias and discrimination.

[22] https://asdah.org/haes/

Gender inequality

Discrimination based on body shape and size should also be recognised as an issue of gender inequality. Women, particularly those with larger bodies, face significantly greater societal pressure regarding body image and weight compared to men. Fat women often experience harsher weight bias and are more vulnerable to unfair treatment and discrimination. For example, several studies have shown that college-aged women with a body mass index (BMI) much higher than average were half as likely to be dating compared to women with a much lower-than-average BMI. For men, weight appeared to have little effect on their dating prospects. In large-scale US samples, fat women were 16 times more likely than men to perceive weight-based discrimination during the hiring process and, if hired, tended to earn less. These are just a few examples among many. In conclusion, discrimination based on size and shape must also be addressed as part of the broader effort to achieve gender equality.

Effects on mental health and participation

The impact of all that has been described above demonstrates, without doubt, that systemic issues profoundly affect individuals. With such constant experiences, the adverse effects can be damaging to a person's livelihood. One important concept to understand in this context is internalisation — the process by which individuals adopt and integrate societal values, norms, and standards as their own. Experiencing ongoing body shaming, discrimination, and bias, one applies such beliefs not only towards other people, but especially to their own. It creates poor self- and body image, low self-esteem, and other lasting effects on mental and physical health.

For example, young people who are teased or bullied about their weight are more likely to experience mental health struggles, such as depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, poor body image, and substance use. Even more so, suicidal thoughts among young people who are teased for their weight are 2 times more common than among those who are not.

Weight stigma can also harm their eating habits, leading to eating disorders, emotional eating, and unhealthy dieting. It can make physical activity less enjoyable and cause them to avoid activities like gym class or sports because these are common places where they might face teasing.

Altogether, these interconnected issues affect how young individuals live their lives, often preventing them from fully participating in society. They can cause individuals to lose connection with their true selves, limit their creativity, and undermine their bodily autonomy. As a result, they may become less likely to participate in activities where they feel their bodies will be judged, such as public speaking, performances, team activities, or dating. The lack of self-expression can affect emotional growth and delay the development of important social skills. As youth work is particularly focused on increasing participation, all these aspects are crucial considerations.

[23] Lee, C. (2011). Body mass index and body image dysfunction as predictors of women's perceived romantic relationship quality.

[24] Roehling, M. V., Roehling, P. V., & Pichler, S. (2007). The relationship between body weight and perceived weight-related employment discrimination: The role of sex and race. Journal of Vocational Behavior, 71(2), 300–318.

[25] Fikkan, J. L., & Rothblum, E. D. (2012). Is fat a feminist issue? Exploring the gendered nature of weight bias. Sex Roles, 66, 575–592.

[26] https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/neuroscience/internalization

[27] Vartanian, L. R., & Porter, A. M. (2016). Weight stigma and eating behavior: A review of the literature. Appetite, 102, 3–14.

[28] Pont, S. J., Puhl, R., Cook, S. R., & Slusser, W. (2017). Stigma experienced by children and adolescents with obesity. Pediatrics, 140(6).

The Youth Work Perspective

Youth work holds immense potential for supporting young people in ways that help them feel valued — for example, by developing skills, fostering inspiration, and building a sense of belonging. Those of us involved in the field are passionately committed to improving young people's lives. However, there is still much to be learned — and much more to be unlearned — both systemically and individually. Over decades of activity in the field, we have identified several challenges concerning the inclusion of diverse bodies.

1

Absence of methodological tools and inclusive practices
Talking about and addressing issues related to personal experiences within our bodies requires particular sensitivity and adaptation. Not only is there a significant lack of methodological tools to educate on these matters, but some existing practices are also not suited to all bodies. A common example is that many energisers and ice-breaking activities involve squatting, jumping, and other movements that may not be possible or comfortable for everyone. Youth workers are not always accustomed to considering this or checking in with participants about the more subtle needs of their bodies.

2

Lack of accessibility
Usually discussed in the context of disabilities, accessibility is a common topic when addressing inclusion. However, it remains the case that many physical spaces exclude certain bodies, whether through ill-fitting or unsafe furniture, or a lack of accessible solutions such as lifts to upper floors. Addressing these issues requires greater awareness and intentional design to create youth workspaces that are truly inclusive and welcoming for all bodies.

3

Lack of body-neutral language and attitudes
This aspect is more personal and requires effort from youth workers on an individual level. Each person carries their own beliefs and understanding of the world we live in. In the current climate of limited awareness, youth workers may, at times, inadvertently perpetuate stereotypes themselves. Comments about body size, shape, or weight — often unintended — are all too common. A lack of inclusive language practices, as well as sensitivity towards differing bodily experiences, can be at best insensitive and, at worst, harmful.

4

Lack of role models
One of the most valuable roles of youth work is specifically the power to inspire and provide role models. Unfortunately, many involved in youth work are not yet able to embrace all bodies (their own and the ones around them) in their full beauty and diversity. It is a missed opportunity for challenging many of the existing biases and a major gap for positive influence on youth.

Barriers to overcome working with **topics related** to **bodies**

Conversations about bodies can arise in numerous contexts, very likely you might have already encountered some of them — not only in discussions about body image, body awareness, and embodiment, but also concerning bullying and harassment, body inclusion (fat, queer, disabled, etc.), media literacy, and critical thinking.

Nonetheless, conversations about body shape and size are often taboo due to prevailing societal stigma, unless the body and its appearance are being criticised or considered within a medical context. It is also a highly personal and sensitive topic that can be fraught with tension, particularly when self-awareness and value systems are not yet fully developed, as is often the case with young people.

You will find on the right several gaps and barriers that you might encounter in body liberation youth work. These vulnerabilities should be taken into consideration when designing human experiences and developing content within an educational context. Alternatively, these guidelines could serve as a starting point for exploring the creation of tangible solutions to support young people.

1. Lack of awareness about systemic issues and existing narratives. Youth may not recognise the broader societal forces shaping body shaming/conditioning/policing or the impact these narratives have on their self-perception.

2. Emotional and physical insecurities. Even if youth workers are committed to creating safe spaces, young people don't always feel completely safe sharing their full selves due to past dismissals or existing society bias. Some topics or activities might feel especially vulnerable and activate insecurities related to the perceived appearance and performance shortcomings of their bodies.

3. Lack of belief in the power of change. Being overwhelmed by stereotypes or the existing systems can make youth feel that speaking up is useless, as nothing will improve. So they remain silent.

4. Lack of tools and language for discussing body-related issues. Without the vocabulary or practice to articulate their positive and negative embodied experiences, youth may struggle to express their feelings or confront body-related stigma.

5. Difficulty challenging dominant societal views. Speaking out against the majority or standing up to ingrained narratives can feel scary and requires courage that many may not yet have.

6. ..or a **complex combination of several of these points.**

Our experiences during formative years directly influence our entire lives, impacting everything from physical health to our sense of belonging and ability to thrive. It is therefore easy to understand the importance of working towards a world where every person can feel free and at ease in their own body — whatever characteristics they may possess. We hope that this brief insight has helped to raise your awareness of why body liberation work is so crucial. You may also find this information useful when advocating within your communities or when planning future activities.

Part 3: Our Shared Vision
What We Want, and How We Get There?

At the heart of body liberation, we believe in the possibility of a greater and fairer world — one where no one is shamed or excluded because of how their body looks, moves, or exists. This section outlines the vision that guides our work and the paths we see towards making it a reality.

We envision a world where all bodies can live **shame-free and joyful lives.**

A WORLD WHERE:

No one is judged based on their body size, shape, ability, or appearance.

Everyone is seen, included, and valued.

People can grow up and grow old, reaching their full potential without facing discrimination.

Society ensures equal opportunities in every aspect of life—from education and public spaces to careers, healthcare, and relationships.

This is not just a dream — it is a direction. And it is one we can move towards, step by step, with intention and care. To turn this vision into action, we focus on three interconnected areas of change:

1. Educate, Advocate, and Promote Inclusion
2. Empower, Equip, and Inspire Individuals
3. Challenge and Transform Systems

To turn this vision into action, we focus on **three** interconnected **areas of change**:

Empower, Equip, and Inspire Individuals

• People of all body types are supported in building confidence and self-acceptance.

• Clothing that fits diverse bodies is accessible and available.

• Medical care, work-places, and public spaces are designed to be inclusive and accommodating.

• Social and romantic opportunities are not limited by appearance

2

Educate, Advocate, and Promote Inclusion

• Youth workers and educators build awareness of their own biases and develop tools to challenge weight stigma, fatphobia, and body discrimination.

• Inclusive practices become more common across youth work, education, and cultural spaces.

• Society begins to challenge harmful beauty ideals and myths about what different bodies can or cannot do.

1

3

Challenge and Transform Systems

• We dismantle systems that treat some bodies as more valuable than others.

• Discrimination in media, health-care, employment, and education is actively addressed.

• Representation of all bodies is prioritized, ensuring visibility, respect, and belonging.

• Cities, communities, and services are made accessible and welcoming for all.

Fair treatment—across all areas of life, for all bodies.

Everything We Do Aims for:

Validation of lived experiences—ensuring people feel heard, s een, and respected.

Together, we are not just imagining change—we are creating it. We are building a world where all bodies are **honored, included, and free** to exist without shame, apology, or limitation.

Breaking societal barriers—especially those that keep people from fully participating because of how they look or move.
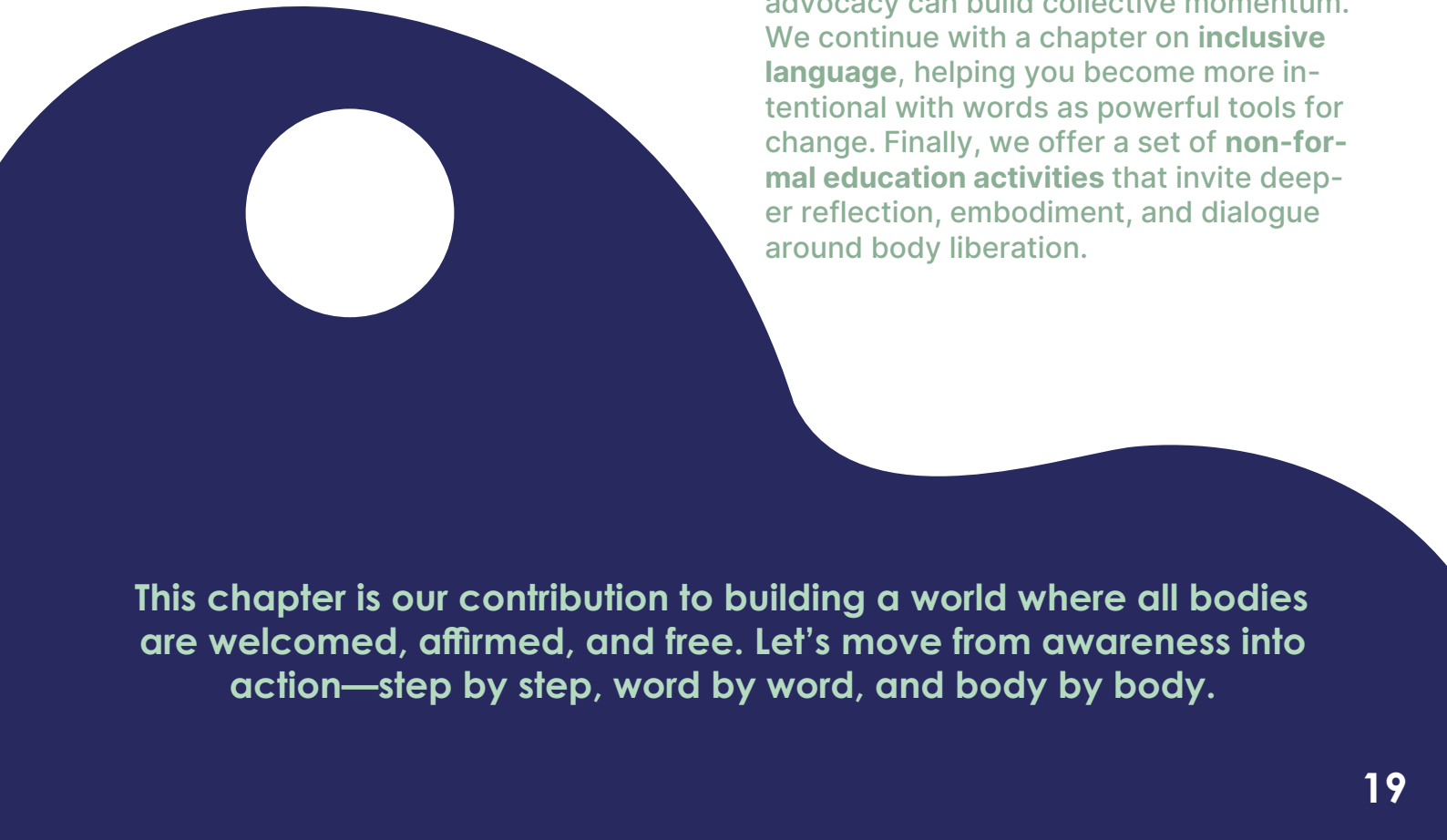
From Awareness to Action

Understanding the roots and impact of weight stigma and body-based discrimination is only one part of the journey toward body liberation. Awareness is essential; however, what we do with that awareness begins to shift systems and change lives. This chapter is dedicated to exploring what those actions couldn't look like.

Importantly, we know that the road to body liberation is not linear. There is no one-size-fits-all approach, and many solutions need to be adaptable to different cultures, languages, and personal backgrounds. Finally, we provide a set of non-fixed rules, shaped as a toolkit built with ideas and methods ready to be implemented into their practice. To try, test, and grow with.

We are starting by introducing microlearning—an innovative and youth-friendly way of raising awareness and fostering learning in small, digestible formats. Next, we explore **inclusive practices** and how they can be embedded into youth work to support people of all body types. We then present the concept of **micro-activism**, showing how small acts of resistance and advocacy can build collective momentum. We continue with a chapter on **inclusive language**, helping you become more intentional with words as powerful tools for change. Finally, we offer a set of **non-formal education activities** that invite deeper reflection, embodiment, and dialogue around body liberation.

This chapter is our contribution to building a world where all bodies are welcomed, affirmed, and free. Let's move from awareness into action—step by step, word by word, and body by body.

Body Liberation Microlearning

What is Microlearning?

Microlearning refers to short, focused chunks of information designed to achieve a specific learning outcome.

Key aspects of microlearning:

- Happens mainly online
- Adapted to contemporary learners and their expectations.
- Self-paced and easily accessible anytime
- Designed to meet a specific learning outcome or objective.
- Short – the duration is not clearly defined and depends on the learning objective, but typically Microlearning content takes the learner 1-10 minutes to consume.
- Designed to prevent cognitive overload
- Optimized for mobile devices to cater to on-the-go learning.
- Highly Visual and Simplified.

The microlearning methodology originated in the corporate world and began to enter the mainstream in the 2000s. Organisations recognised the potential of this approach to enhance knowledge retention and engagement in corporate training programmes. It responds to the common needs of today's learners, who have shorter attention spans than ever, by providing relevant, easily accessible content in a consistent and engaging format.

One of the key aspects of the methodology is the consumption of the content, which places it between informal and formal, or non-formal education. The learning provider creates the content with specific objectives and clear learning outcomes, which are characteristic of formal and non-formal education. On the other hand, content can be consumed randomly, and learning can be ¨accidental¨, which characterizes informal learning.

Examples of microlearning:

- Short videos
- Infographics and illustrations
- Questionnaires
- Interactive tutorials
- Interactive resources
- Online mini-courses
- Gamification activities
- Checklists
- Podcasts
- Quizzes and games

Action-led microlearning (This microlearning example encourages learners to be reflective and actively engage with the content by putting their plan together for developing their skills instead of passively absorbing information.)

Why **Microlearning** in **Youth Work** ?

1 To Be Where Young People Are.
Young people spend a significant portion of their time on social media platforms and using mobile devices. Microlearning allows youth workers to meet them in their digital spaces, leveraging platforms like Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube to deliver educational content effectively.

2 To Adapt to Modern Learning Needs.
Modern learners prefer bite-sized, engaging content that fits into their fast-paced lives. Microlearning aligns with this preference by providing short, impactful lessons that are easy to consume and retain, making education relevant to today's

3 To Make Learning Accessible and Flexible.
Microlearning content is mobile-friendly and accessible anytime, anywhere. This flexibility ensures that young people can engage with educational material at their convenience, breaking barriers like location, time, or device limitations.

4 Raising Interest and AwaWreness
Often, young people don't realise they lack knowledge or skills in certain areas—this is known as unconscious incompetence, the first stage of the Four Stages of Competence model. To start developing a competence, awareness must first be raised. For example, a young person cannot develop the ability to participate in a learning mobility program if they don't know such opportunities exist. Microlearning is an effective tool for raising awareness, especially about social issues and topics like body liberation.

5 To Make Learning More Efficient.
Microlearning prevents cognitive overload by focusing on one concept or skill at a time. This structured approach makes learning more efficient, helping young people retain information better and apply it in real-life contexts.

6 Compatible with Learning Mobility.
Youth work often involves mobility, such as exchange programs, workshops, or outreach activities. Micro-learning supports this by offering portable and adaptable content that young people can access on the go, ensuring continuity in their learning experience.

Four Stages of Competence

Unconscious
COMPETENCE
Performing the skill becomes automatic

Conscious
COMPETENCE
You are able to use the skill, but only with effort.

Conscious
INCOMPETENCE
You are aware of the skill, but not yet proficient

Unconscious
INCOMPETENCE
You are unaware of the skill and lack of proficient

Body Liberation
Microlearning Methodology

Microlearning is a versatile educational approach that can and should be tailored to the specific context, objectives, and the target groups it serves. Just as we would not use the same methods for onboarding a new employee as we would for raising awareness about body shaming, microlearning in the context of body liberation must be designed with intention and purpose.

The **Body Liberation Methodology** provides a structured framework to plan educational activities better and choose the right tools to achieve specific goals with both **young people** and **youth workers.** It is important to note that this methodology is not a one-size-fits-all solution that addresses all the challenges young people face regarding body image. Rather, it is an essential tool that can contribute significantly to the broader goal of promoting body liberation and challenging harmful societal norms around body size and shape.

Our methodology is organised around **GOALS**, each of which corresponds to a specific objective. For each function, we identified its target group, appropriate tools, and additional comments to ensure the approach is effective and adaptable.

The target groups for this project are as follows:

1 **Youth Workers and Educators** – including organisations they represent, individuals who work primarily in the fields of inclusion, mental health, body image, and acceptance, even when their roles extend beyond these topics.

2 **Youth of Erope** – All young people between 13 and 30 years old, with a primary focus on raising awareness about body liberation and the importance of tackling body shaming.

GOAL 1: Raise Awareness About the Need to Address the Topic of **Body Liberation**

Target Group: Youth Workers & Young People

- Understand the concept of body liberation.
- Recognise who suffers from aesthetic
- violence and body shaming.
- Identify the challenges young people face
- related to body image.
- Understand the consequences of body
- shaming, body size, and shape discrimination.

Proposed Objectives:

- Learn key terms related to body liberation and weight stigma.
- Become more aware of the effects of weight stigma on young people.
- Understand body liberation principles as a
- potential solution.
- Explore inclusive language and rule it over
- body liberation.

Proposed Microlearning Tools:

1

Short Videos:
1-2 minute videos introducing key concepts such as "What is Body Liberation?", "What is Aesthetic Violence?", and "The Impact of Weight Stigma." **Why?** These videos are quick to consume, eye-catching, and shareable on social media, making them ideal for reaching a broad audience.

Objective: Create a foundation of understanding about body liberation and body shaming.

2

Visuals & Infographics:
Visually striking infographics that explain body shaming statistics, the effects of weight stigma, or definitions of key terms. **Why?** Infographics are a great way to distill complex concepts into digestible, visually appealing content that can easily be shared or displayed in youth settings.

Objective: Raise awareness about body shaming, weight stigma, and the importance of body liberation.

3

Checklists:
Simple, actionable checklists like "Signs of Body Shaming" or "How to Use Inclusive Language." **Why?** Easy-to-follow and applicable immediately. These tools encourage participation and self-reflection.

Objective: Guide users in identifying and changing harmful behaviors.

4

Social Media Challenges:
Organise a "Body Liberation Awareness Week" challenge, where participants share their thoughts or actions related to body-related topics. **Why?** Engages youth in a fun, participatory way, encouraging them to reflect and share their experiences.

Objective: Foster a sense of community and raise awareness of body liberation principles.

5

Quizzes & Polls:
Create short, interactive quizzes (e.g., "How much do you know about body shaming?" or "Test your body liberation knowledge") that allow users to gauge their understanding. **Why?** Quizzes make learning more interactive and can help assess understanding. Polls can also be used to gather audience perspectives.

Objective: Deepen understanding through active recall and self-assessment.

Comment: The goal is to provide engaging, bite-sized content that captures attention and sparks curiosity. Since learners are often unfamiliar with the topic, the content should be engaging and easy to process, using interactive elements to maintain their interest.

GOAL 2:
Inclusive Practices Growth Toward All Body Sizes and Types

Target Group: Youth Workers

Proposed Objectives:

- Gain knowledge and skills to address body size and shape discrimination, body shaming, and hate speech among young people.
- Learn best practices to address body shaming and promote body inclusivity.

- Discover examples of inclusive practices and tools to initiate discussions.
- Understand the role of body liberation in youth work and inclusion.
- Learn where to find additional resources and stakeholders working on this issue.

Proposed Microlearning Tools:

1

Short Video Lectures:
5-7 minute videos from experts or experienced youth workers discussing topics like "How to Address Body Shaming in Youth Groups" or "Inclusive Language in Practice." **Why?** Provides more detailed insights while keeping the learner engaged with shorter formats.

Objective: Equip youth workers with concrete knowledge and strategies to foster inclusivity.

2

Visuals & Infographics:
Infographics with key principles of body liberation in youth work, such as "Steps to Handle Body Shaming in Group Settings" or "Promoting Body Inclusivity." **Why?** Visuals simplify complex topics, making them accessible and actionable.

Objective: Provide clear guidelines for practical action.

3

Checklists:
A checklist for youth workers, like "Inclusive Youth Group Activities" or "Steps to Implement Body Liberation in Your Program." **Why?** Offers practical guidance that youth workers can follow step-by-step.

Objective: Foster concrete actions towards more inclusive practices in youth work.

4

Micro-MOOC (Massive Open Online Course):
A series of short modules (each around 5–10 minutes) that guide youth workers through topics like body shaming, inclusive practices, and practical steps for creating supportive environments. **Why?** Structured learning with opportunities for quizzes, interaction, and deeper engagement.

Objective: Offer in-depth learning with practical tools and resources for implementation.

5

Interactive Webinars or Live Q&A Sessions:
Host live webinars with experts or experienced youth workers where youth workers can ask questions and discuss challenges. **Why?** Interactive sessions provide real-time learning and peer-to-peer exchange.

Objective: Deepen understanding and facilitate the sharing of best practices.

6

Resource Database:
Curate a digital resource hub with articles, videos, guides, and tools that help youth workers continue their education on body liberation. **Why?** A one-stop shop for ongoing learning and access to relevant tools and resources.

Objective: Provide youth workers with easy access to materials that support their practice.

Comment: For youth workers, the tools should be interactive, informative, and support action-oriented learning. The aim is not only to raise awareness but to equip them with practical, implementable strategies that they can use immediately.

GOAL3:
Initiate Discussions on Weight Stigma and Body Size or Shape Discrimination in European Youth Work

Target Group: Youth Workers

Proposed Objectives:

- Initiate a process of de-stigmatising the word "*fat*" and showcase tangible benefits for those harmed by body shaming.
- Understand controversies around the topic and how to handle them.

- Raise motivation among youth workers to engage in the topic of body liberation.
- Bring attention to body size and shape discrimination in the European Youth Work Agenda.
- Create a community of people interested in the topic.

Proposed Microlearning Tools:

1

Short Videos:
1–2 minute videos highlighting controversies around body size discrimination, such as the de-stigmatisation of the word "fat" or addressing weight-related jokes in youth spaces. **Why?** Quick and attention-grabbing content that highlights the importance of the topic.

Objective: Spark curiosity and motivation for deeper engagement in the topic.

2

Visuals & Infographics:
Create a series of visuals on the benefits of body liberation and the importance of addressing weight stigma in youth work, such as "Why We Need to De-stigmatise the Word 'Fat'" or "The Impact of Weight Discrimination on Youth Mental Health." **Why?** Visually compelling content that supports arguments and makes them easier to understand and discuss.

Objective: Raise awareness and challenge harmful stereotypes.

3

Checklists:
A checklist for youth workers with actions like "How to Start Conversations on Body Liberation" or "How to Facilitate Discussions About Weight Stigma." **Why?** Provides concrete steps that youth workers can take to initiate important discussions.

Objective: Empower youth workers to start conversations that may be difficult but are necessary for change.

4

Podcast Series:
A podcast series that explores topics like weight stigma, the politics of body image, and real-life stories of people affected by body shaming. **Why?** Podcasts provide an opportunity to dive deep into complex topics and hear from multiple perspectives.

Objective: Provide an in-depth exploration of controversies and provide actionable solutions.

5

Online Discussion Forums or Social Media Groups:
Create a space (e.g., on a platform like Instagram, Facebook, or other community-building tool) where youth workers and young people can share ideas, challenges, and resources on body liberation. **Why?** Community-building through open dialogues helps normalize the discussion and builds collective action.

Objective: Build a practice community that allows peer support and resource sharing.

6

Resource Database:
Use polls and surveys to ask youth workers and young people about their experiences with body shaming and weight stigma. The data could be shared anonymously to foster discussion. **Why?** Polls and surveys allow learners realising where they stand compared to others, which could showcase the importance of the issue.

Objective: Gather insights while encouraging reflection and participation.

Comment: In this phase, the goal is to begin and sustain meaningful conversations. Both viral and knowledge-based tools should be used to ensure a balance between sparking interest and providing depth.

Body Liberation
Microlearning Best Practices Checklist

☑ **CREATE CONTENT WHICH FITS DIVERSE LEARNING STYLES**

Cater to different learning styles by including a variety of media such as videos, infographics, written content, and interactive elements. This ensures that everyone has an opportunity to engage with the material effectively.

☑ **REMINDINGTHE CONTENT BEING INCLUSIVE (AND REPRESENTATIVE)**

Ensure that all content represents a wide range of identities and experiences. Avoid stereotypes and provide representation for diverse bodies, abilities, and perspectives.

☑ **CREATE A SOCIAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY BUILDING AROUND THE TOPIC**

Encourage interaction among learners by incorporating community space, group activities, and opportunities for peer support. Create a safe space for sharing experiences and learning collaboratively.

☑ **ALWAYS LINK ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO FOLLOW UP**

Provide links to articles, books, videos, or expert interviews for learners who wish to deepen their understanding. Highlight trustworthy, relevant resources and resources by the Body Liberation Network.

☑ **DEVELOP HIGH-QUALITY CONTENT WHICH IS SHAREABLE**

Use professional tools and high-quality visuals, audio, and design to create content that users are excited to share. This helps extend the reach and impact of your message.

☑ **USE GOOD TITLES FOR SEO BUT AVOID CLICKBAIT**

Write engaging and clear titles that accurately represent the content to improve search engine visibility. Steer clear of misleading or exaggerated claims.

Body Liberation
Inclusive Practices

To support body liberation, inclusive practices foster environments where everyone feels respected, valued, experiences a sense of belonging, and is empowered to engage fully. Drawing on insights from the Inclusion Toolbox, these practices can foster understanding, reduce stigma, and promote acceptance of diverse body types, sizes, abilities, and identities. In microlearning, these practices become especially powerful, offering small, consistent actions that gradually build a culture of inclusivity.

1. Embracing Diversity in All Forms

Inclusive practices start with an acknowledgment of diversity. This means actively affirming that bodies of all types, sizes, and abilities have value. Inclusion-focused microlearning can use diverse representation in images, examples, and case studies to showcase various body types, challenging narrow standards of appearance. For example, using real stories and visuals that depict a range of body sizes, physical abilities, and ages can make educational content more relatable and meaningful to a wide audience.

Microlearning modules can focus on debunking myths around "ideal" bodies, exploring how societal standards impact mental health and self-perception, and demonstrating the beauty in uniqueness. This approach fosters a foundation where learners understand that all bodies, including those that may not fit societal "norms," are deserving of respect and inclusion.

2. Creating Accessible Learning Environments

Accessibility is essential to inclusive body liberation practices. All materials should be designed with diverse needs in mind, using formats that ensure learning is accessible to everybody. For instance, providing closed captions on videos, using screen-reader-compatible text, and offering both visual and auditory learning options can make content accessible for everyone, including those with physical or sensory disabilities.

Additionally, inclusive microlearning should consider pacing and content adaptability, allowing learners to engage at their own pace and revisit material when needed. This accessibility not only ensures broader participation but also communicates that learning should be inclusive of everyone's needs, reinforcing the message that all bodies have value and potential.

3. Promoting a Culture of Belonging

Body liberation depends on creating a strong sense of belonging for all individuals. Microlearning can cultivate this by encouraging empathy and self-reflection, helping learners understand how their body perception has been shaped and how they can contribute to a more inclusive society. Including exercises like self-reflective journaling, discussions, or scenario-based learning can help individuals recognise their own biases, examine the roots of these attitudes, and explore inclusive behaviors.

In practice, this might involve short, reflective activities that prompt learners to think about how they can affirm diverse bodies in their daily interactions. By providing structured, reflective prompts, microlearning can create a safe space for learners to identify and challenge harm-ful beliefs, while also celebrating diversity and promoting acceptance.

4. Educating on Non-Discriminatory Language and Behavior

Language shapes perceptions and influences attitudes. Inclusive microlearning should educate learners on using non-discriminatory, respectful language and behaviors when discussing bodies. By teaching inclusive terminology and encouraging respectful dialogue, we can help learners become more mindful of how words impact others. Modules can focus on common language mistakes, respectful corrections, and examples of inclusive vocabulary, which contribute to a culture that respects bodily diversity.

Additionally, learners can engage in scenarios where they practice inclusive communication. Through these exercises, learners gain skills to respond thoughtfully to body-shaming or discriminatory comments, fostering environments that promote body liberation.

5. Addressing Implicit Biases and Stereotypes

Implicit biases often reinforce exclusionary attitudes toward certain body types, sizes, or abilities. Microlearning offers an accessible, gradual way to tackle these biases, helping learners become more aware of their unconscious assumptions. Short assessments, reflective prompts, and situational exercises can raise awareness about personal biases related to bodies and guide learners to replace these biases with understanding and acceptance.

Learners could participate in activities where they identify and challenge common stereotypes, such as assumptions about health based on size or capability based on appearance. This awareness can lead to more empathetic behaviors and a stronger commitment to body-positive, inclusive interactions.

Conclusion

Inclusive practices in body liberation empower individuals to challenge body-based prejudice, foster respect, and promote acceptance. By integrating these practices into microlearning modules, we can cultivate small yet impactful changes in mindset and behaviour. Through embracing diversity, ensuring accessibility, fostering a sense of belonging, using respectful language, and addressing biases, we lay the foundation for a more inclusive society — one where everybody is recognised, respected, and free to thrive.

https://rm.coe.int/inclusion-toolbox-final/1680a9173e

Micro-activism

In the field of body liberation and fat acceptance, we often call ourselves activists. This is because our work isn't just youth work or education—it's about resisting and challenging existing norms and practices. And for what matters - assisting others in doing it. While in the EU youth work often focuses on local and international activities to create a more inclusive society, this section of the manual shines a light on another kind of activism. **You don't need a title or a big plan to start advocating for a world where everybody is valued and free to exist authentically!** This is where micro-activism comes in. These are small, meaningful actions taken by one or two people. It is accessible, spontaneous, and impactful as it does not require lots of resources and can be done even by those who don't consider themselves particularly active or outspoken.

Here are 9 ways you can practice micro-activism already now:

1. Learn about body shape and size discrimination.

This topic is new, and many myths need debunking. Start by educating yourself about body size and shape injustice in society. If you're unsure where to begin, check out our glossary and expand from there. Explore content in formats you prefer—books, articles, videos, or others. Reflect critically on how societal norms, policies, and practices sustain systems of discrimination and marginalise certain types of bodies. The more you learn, the easier it becomes to recognise and challenge these injustices.

2. Listen actively to those marginalised

In addition to learning from secondary sources, learn from the people around you. Gaining personal insight into lived experiences is one of the most valuable ways to understand the impact of body shape and size discrimination. Open and unbiased conversations on this topic remain rare; therefore, actively seek opportunities to raise your awareness. Ask questions yourself and give people of all shapes and sizes the space to share their experiences. Keep your eyes and ears open — but even more so, your mind and heart — to realities that may challenge many mainstream beliefs. This applies both privately and in youth work.

3. Radical self-acceptance

In a culture that profits from body dissatisfaction, being content — even happy — in your body is an act of resistance. It begins with examining your beliefs and your relationship with your body. Change occurs when you recognise and reject external notions, choosing to exist just as you are. This may involve rethinking beauty standards, societal expectations, and ideas of what is considered "acceptable." From there, you work towards radical self-acceptance.

How does this help others? By living authentically and unapologetically, you show others the beauty of body diversity. For young people, especially, this representation shapes their understanding of what is "normal" and "acceptable." If you live in a marginalised body, your example becomes even more powerful, offering another perspective and modelling body liberation for others.

4. Support marginalised voices on social media

Most action takes place at a grassroots level, long before we reach widespread consensus on body shape and size discrimination. In our daily lives, this is evident in the work of activists and content creators on social media. They educate society and spark a wide range of conversations about body diversity, while providing visibility and representation for marginalised bodies.

As a social media user, you have significant power that can be harnessed as a tool for everyday activism. By following and engaging with the content of these creators, you help to increase their visibility. Additionally, by sharing their content on your channels, you not only extend their reach but also raise awareness within your networks.

5. Use language as a form of activism

that you can apply both individually and in your work. Beyond being mindful, you can also use language intentionally as a tool for activism. For example, using the word fat as a neutral descriptor contributes to creating a world where the word cannot be weaponized to harm others. It is a way of reclaiming power — but it remains important to be sensitive about where and how you use it.

6. Radical self-acceptance

Choose to support businesses, brands, and organisations that align with the values of body liberation. This might include companies that offer inclusive sizing, advocate for diversity, or explicitly reject discrimination based on body size and shape. Providing financial and vocal support to ethical and small businesses owned by people from marginalised groups sends a powerful message and supports their livelihoods. At the same time, their success contributes to the broader success of the cause itself.

7. Advocate, stand up, or just be an ally.

Use your voice and privilege to advocate for those who are marginalised. In youth work, this might mean taking action to make spaces more inclusive for young people. On a personal level, such advocacy can be as simple as redirecting a conversation, speaking out against body shaming and other harmful comments, or checking in on a friend who has experienced discrimination. Simply showing that injustice does not go unnoticed can be one of the most powerful ways to make a difference in someone's life.

8. Organise a support group.

Support groups are a powerful way to build community and solidarity, helping participants feel seen and validated. Such groups create judgment-free spaces that offer emotional support and empower individuals to navigate and resist injustices related to body shape and size collectively. Simply coming together with like-minded friends who share similar struggles, or facilitating an open support group for young people, can be a simple yet deeply rewarding step towards change.

9. Organise a support group.

It is remarkably easy to increase the role of youth work in addressing body shape and size discrimination — especially if you are already working on inclusion topics with young people or other audiences. From now on, whenever you create educational materials, facilitate an event, or write a project, simply remember to include body shape and size as legitimate grounds for discrimination. By integrating this topic as an extension of your existing practices, you can make a small but consistent contribution towards a broader and more inclusive youth work.

Inclusive Language
A Tool for Change

Language is one of the most powerful tools we use every day. It shapes **perceptions**, builds narratives, and either reinforces or challenges **societal norms**. In youth work and activist spaces, it's crucial to reflect on whether the words we choose are truly inclusive. Inclusive language is not about perfection — it's about **intention, impact**, and a commitment to **learning**.

So, how do we ensure our language promotes inclusion and avoids stereotypes? Start by asking: Am I using **gender-sensitive language**? Am I mindful of people's **identities** and **experiences**? Am I unintentionally reinforcing microaggressions or outdated ideas?

Inclusive language respects **self-identification** and centres the voices of those we speak about or with. For example, using **gender-neutral terms** like "parents" instead of "mother/father" creates space for diverse family structures. Similarly, when referring to people with disabilities or other **marginalised groups, person-first language** ("person with a disability") is often preferred — though some communities, like fat activists, may request **identity-first language** ("fat person") as a political statement. The key is to do the research and follow the lead of those directly impacted. **Impact** matters more than **intention**. Even subtle phrases like "normal people" or "healthy bodies" can reinforce exclusion. Instead, opt for clear, descriptive alternatives like "people without disabilities" or "people with different body types."

Another important note: **context** matters. Words like "fat" carry different meanings in different settings. While it can be hurtful when used carelessly, it's also a word being reclaimed by activists to challenge fatphobia and promote body liberation. Using "fat" as a neutral descriptor when appropriate can raise awareness and help normalise diverse body sizes — so long as it's done with care and respect.

Ultimately, inclusive language is about **accountability, accessibility**, and continuous **education**. There is no single right answer for every situation or language, but the more we think critically about the words we use, the more space we create for voices that have too often been silenced. Language, when used with intention, can be a powerful vehicle for social change.

NFE activities

As part of our body liberation toolkit, non-formal education (NFE) offers powerful, experience-based methods to connect with young people on a deeper level, making it particularly well-suited for sensitive and personal topics like body image and inclusion.

This section presents a set of practical, ready-to-use activities that help participants explore their relationships with their bodies, challenge societal norms, and foster empathy and critical thinking.

Each activity includes step-by-step guidance, materials needed, and reflection prompts, making them easy to implement and adapt. We invite you to use these tools in your work — adding your creativity and sensitivity to ensure they resonate with the specific needs of your group.

These methods have already been tested in youth work settings, but we welcome your feedback and experiences. If you use them, please let us know how it went — we'd love to learn from your practice and keep improving together.

Title: **The river**

Activity to help participants reflect about their relationship with their body.

Space and materials:

- **White A4 paper for all participant**
- **Colors for drawing/painting**
- **Calm background music**
- **Space for individual and small group work**

Description of the tool:
In this activity, participants will draw a river that represents the story of their lives in relation to their bodies.

Step 1: Introduce the activity and explain the task of creating a personal drawing. Emphasise that they should be as honest as possible with themselves; this task is for them, and they will later share only what they feel comfortable sharing with others. You may show an example of how the river might look.

Step 2: Ask participants to find a comfortable place, and if they wish, to close their eyes and take three deep breaths. Then follow the visualisation text provided in Annex 1.

Step 3: Give participants 20 minutes to create their rivers. You can play some background music to support reflection and the creative process.

Step 4: Divide participants into groups of three, and ask them to share with each other their rivers, describing what it looks like and what they discovered about their relationship with their bodies. Allow 20 minutes for sharing.

Step 5: Debriefing. Invite participants to come together in a plenary circle and discuss how the activity was for them.

Questions for debriefing:

- How did you feel during the activity?
- How was it for you to use the metaphor of a river to reflect on your relationship with your body?
- Was there anything surprising in your personal reflection?
- Did you discover anything interesting about your relationship with your body?
- Did you notice any similarities or differences between the rivers in your small groups?
- What learnings would you like to take away from this activity?

Tips for facilitators:
It is useful to have an example of a river to show participants.

Annex 1: Visualization

* Let's start with some of your earliest memories of being aware of your body.
* What is your earliest memory of believing that being thinner — or something else — was better?
* During your teenage years, what did you think about your body, your style, or your clothes at that time? What external messages were you receiving about how your body should look?
* Have you ever tried to hide your body in any way? How did you do that? Which part of your body did you try to hide, and in what setting — for example, in intimate relationships, going to the beach, or elsewhere?
* How do you feel about your body now, as an adult? Have you ever felt shame when someone pointed out so-called 'flaws' or 'defects' in your body?
* What has your body enabled you to do in your life? What are some important achievements of your body?
* What is your relationship with your body today?
* Which beliefs are you still carrying with you now? And which beliefs do you need or want to embrace?

This activity is an adaptation of an activity called ¨River of learning¨ from Handbook for facilitators Learning to Learn in practice. Adapted by Body Liberation Collective.

Title: **Where Do You Stand**

Activity to facilitate discussion and understanding of different points of view regarding challenging aspects of body liberation.

Space and materials:

- A large space with signs reading AGREE and DISAGREE placed at opposite sides of the room.
- Preferably, some chairs for participants to sit on if the discussion runs longer.
- A projector to display the statements.

Description of the tool:

In this activity, participants will draw a river that represents the story of their lives in relation to their bodies.

Step 1: Explain to participants that they will take part in a discussion where they will be shown a statement. They will have a minute to reflect privately on whether they agree or disagree, and then position themselves in the room accordingly.

Step 2: Present the statement and ask participants to reflect and choose their position. Explain that they may change sides at any point if they reconsider their view. Then invite participants to explain why they took a specific position. Facilitate the discussion, encouraging respectful exchange of perspectives.

Step 3: Conduct as many rounds as time allows and as you feel necessary for meaningful discussion.

Step 4: Debriefing. Invite participants to come together in a plenary circle and reflect on the experience.

Questions for debriefing:

- Were there any statements that people found impossible to answer — either because it was difficult to form an opinion or because the statement was poorly phrased?
- Why did people change their position during the discussion?
- Were people surprised by the extent of disagreement on the issues?
- Does it matter if we disagree on this topic?
- Do you think there are "right" and "wrong" answers to the statements, or is it purely a matter of personal opinion?
- What are the main learning points you will take away from this activity?

Tips for facilitators:

Some participants may position themselves very quickly, which can influence others. To avoid this, it is recommended first to display the statement, then give participants a minute to reflect, and only then invite them to move to their chosen side once you give a clear signal.

Annex 1: Statements

- It is better to be fat than to have amputated legs.
- It is acceptable for some industries not to hire fat people.
- Being fat depends solely on the strength of the individual's will.
- There is no job that a fat person cannot do.
- Weight-loss diets do not work.
- Fat people should lose weight for the sake of their health.
- If my child is too fat, I will help them lose weight to prevent them from being bullied.
- Not dating a fat person because of personal preference is discrimination.

This is an adaptation of the activity ¨Where do you stand¨ from COMPASS - Manual for Human Rights Education with Young People. Adapted by Body Liberation Collective.

Title: **Take a Step Forward**

This activity aims to create empathy among participants towards individuals experiencing varying degrees of oppression from an intersectional perspective through embodiment and roleplay.

Space and materials:

- **Open space without barriers, allowing for free movement.**

Description of the tool:

Step 1: Participants are given role cards to read privately. **The role cards include:**

- Good-looking fat woman. She was bullied for her weight in childhood. Was fat. Is fat.
- A successful fat activist raising awareness.
- The average-sized teenager was told by her mother that she needs to go on a diet to lose weight.
- Unemployed Middle Eastern trans woman living in Europe.
- Roma teenager with five siblings living in Bulgaria.
- Fashion influencer in her early twenties with Down syndrome.
- Middle-aged Eastern European non-binary person using a wheelchair.
- Daughter of the US ambassador in Germany. Tall, blonde, and pretty.
- A successful young businessman who owns a yacht on the French Riviera.
- A black immigrant sex worker living in Italy. Pregnant.
- Black French freelance visual artist living in Paris.
- Butch* lesbian tattoo artist living in Turkey. (*Butch refers to a lesbian who exhibits a masculine identity or gender presentation.)
- Blind teenager on the autism spectrum.

Step 2: Participants are asked to lie or sit comfortably with their eyes closed while the facilitator guides them through a visualisation (meditative music can be used to enhance the atmosphere). **Guided Visualisation:**

- Think of the day you were born. Who was there? What did the place look like? Was it a hospital? A home? Somewhere else? Was your birth a happy moment?

- Think of your early childhood. Were you loved enough? Hugged enough? Did you eat well?

- Think of your late childhood or early teenage years. Did you go to school? Did you work? What did these places look like? Were you popular? Shy? Were you bullied? Did you often feel lonely?
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- Think of the first time you fell in love. Was it a happy or a sad feeling? Could you talk about these feelings with family and friends? Could you talk with the person you love?
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- Think of your late teens. How did you feel about your future? Was it exciting? Scary? Think of your first sexual experience. How was it? How did it change you?

- Think of your career. Did you choose it? Did you enjoy it? Was it fulfilling emotionally and financially? Were you successful at it?

- Think of your home and family life. Did you start a family? Did you have a stable home?

- Think of your older years. Did you make it to old age? Imagine your grey hair and wrinkled skin. Who was with you then? Did you have support in your old age? Was it easy to access healthcare?

- Think of your death. Where was it? Who was there? Was it sad or peaceful? Imagine your funeral. How many people were there?

The Privilege Walk:

Participants are asked to stand in a line next to each other and to take one step forward only if the answer to the statement is yes, while the facilitator reads out the following statements:

- My parents love me.
- I was never a victim of bullying.
- I was never sexually harassed.
- I am living a meaningful life.
- People I like usually like me back.
- I feel sexy.
- I can see myself finding love and starting a family.
- I can get a decent job.
- Spaces I like to be in are designed for my needs.
- If I get sick, there will always be someone to care for me.
- I don't have to worry about my finances.
- I have close friends I can share anything with.
- I don't need therapy, and if I ever do, I can afford it.
- I am not scared of the police.
- I feel safe in public spaces.
- At my funeral, many people will cry.

Debrief Questions:

- Look around at where everyone else is standing.

- How did it feel to be so far ahead or so far behind?

- Were there moments when you didn't know how to answer? Which answer did you go with in the end?

- Did you learn something new about the experience of your role card character or the experiences of others?

Tips for facilitators:

Breathe deeply during the visualisation, use a soft voice, and make long pauses between questions to allow the images to form.

This activity is an adaptation of an activity called ¨Take a step forward¨ from Compass: Manual for Human Rights Education. Adapted by Body Liberation Collective.

Title: **Embodied Movement Activity**

Physical workout grounded in theatrical practice.

Space and materials:

- **Open space without barriers, allowing for free movement.**

Description of the tool:

Step 1: Warm-up

Use any warm-up you feel comfortable with. Examples include breath-induced movement, stretching, flexing, and consciously moving muscles from toes to neck. Encourage sighing and releasing tension.

Step 2: Main activity

Participants are asked to walk randomly around the space with open eyes and expanded awareness. Instruct them to avoid walking in circles and to break familiar movement patterns. Ask them to fill the space, ensuring there are no large empty areas left unoccupied.

Initially, participants should avoid looking at each other. After a few minutes, invite them to make eye contact without any facial expression. Gradually, encourage them to respond when their eyes meet — a smile, a nod — while continuing to walk.

Next, while still moving, guide them to synchronise their pace using facilitator instructions:

- 1 being the slowest pace,

- 10 being the fastest.

The facilitator should call out numbers to prompt sudden changes of pace and encourage participants who are out of sync to expand their awareness and adapt to the group rhythm.

Once the group is moving in sync, the next stage begins. Ask participants to imitate both the movement and the emotion of the group while moving intuitively. They may also make sounds and imitate the sounds of others.

When the facilitator feels the participants have understood the exercise, they gently touch one person on the shoulder — this person becomes the leader whose movements and sounds the group imitates. When that person finishes, they tap another on the shoulder, passing leadership on. Continue until everyone in the room has had a chance to lead.

Step 3: Debrief

Bring participants back into a circle and guide a cool-down breathing exercise. Facilitate a short discussion:

- How did everyone feel during the exercise?
- What did they notice about their movements or emotions?

Tips for facilitators:

- Consent for touching each other's shoulders should be taken at the start.
- The facilitator should ensure they can see everyone in the space and encourage participants to free themselves from imposed movement habits.
- Encourage playfulness — being silly should be welcomed and celebrated!

Glossary

Body liberation – freedom from social and political systems of oppression that designate certain bodies as more worthy, healthy, and desirable than others.

Fat liberation – a movement that challenges fatphobia and promotes body autonomy for fat people.

Fat activism (fat acceptance movement) – a social movement that seeks to challenge the stigma and discrimination against fat people. It promotes body acceptance, self-love, and the right to live a healthy and fulfilling life regardless of body size. Fat activists work to change social norms, challenge harmful beauty standards, and advocate for policies that protect the rights of fat people.

Body image – a complex concept that encompasses a person's thoughts, feelings, and perceptions about their own body. It is influenced by a variety of factors, including genetics, personal experiences, cultural norms, and media images.

Health at every size – an approach to health and wellness that focuses on overall well-being rather than weight loss. It emphasizes the importance of body acceptance, self-care, and healthy behaviors regardless of body size.

Size inclusivity – the practice of designing, producing, and promoting products, services, and representation that cater to a wide range of body sizes, recognising that there is no one-size-fits-all approach. It challenges industry norms that often exclude people of larger sizes and promotes a more diverse and inclusive market.

Body inclusivity – the practice of embracing and celebrating the diversity of human bodies, recognising that all bodies are worthy of respect, dignity, and representation. It challenges harmful beauty standards and promotes a culture of body acceptance and care.

Body positivity vs. neutrality – Body positivity aims to foster unconditional self-love and appreciation for all body types, while body neutrality promotes a state of non-judgmental acceptance, shifting focus from appearance to functionality and bodily capabilities. In the context of body liberation, body neutrality emerges as a more sustainable and accessible approach, as it acknowledges the complexities of body image and the challenges of constantly loving one's physical form. By removing the pressure to embrace or celebrate every aspect of our bodies, body neutrality allows for a more realistic and compassionate relationship with our physical selves. Additionally, within fat activism, body positivity is criticized for its uncritical celebration of bodies, focus on appearance over health, perceived as exclusivity, and especially for unethical usage of this term by companies.

Fategories – a concept within the fat activism movement that recognises the spectrum of fatness and its impact on experiences. People can identify as small fat, mid-fat, infinifat, and others.

Straight-sized people – those who fall within the standard sizing range for clothing, typically sizes 0–14 for women and S–XXL for men. This terminology is often used in the fashion industry to distinguish between these sizes and those considered plus-size.

Intersectionality – in the context of body liberation and fat activism, this refers to how fat oppression intersects with other forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism, and classism, leading to compounded experiences of discrimination and marginalization. Fat activists advocate for a holistic approach that addresses the unique challenges faced by diverse fat individuals across intersecting identities.

Intuitive eating – an evidence-based approach to mindful eating that encourages listening to the body's natural cues of hunger and fullness, energy levels, and other needs, rather than following rigid dietary rules. It promotes a positive relationship with food and a healthy body image, and is often used as a counter-approach to diet culture.

CHALLENGES BEING TACKLED

Body-based oppression – encompasses the systematic marginalization and discrimination of individuals based on their physical characteristics, including body weight, height, skin color, physical disabilities, and other bodily variations.

Fat oppression (weight-based oppression) – the systematic marginalization and discrimination of people based on their body weight. It manifests in various forms, including prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination in employment, healthcare, and other areas of life.

Fatphobia (also referred to as anti-fat, fatmisia, weight bias, or weight stigma) – the prejudice against, aversion to, or discrimination against people who are fat (or perceived as fat). It manifests in various ways, including negative stereotypes, unsolicited comments about weight, and a lack of representation throughout the media.

Internalised fatphobia – the act of absorbing and applying societal beliefs about weight and body size to oneself. It occurs when individuals internalise negative stereotypes and messages about fatness, leading to self-loathing, shame, and negative body image.

Weight bias – a prejudice or negative attitude toward people based on their weight. It is often based on the assumption that people who are overweight are lazy, unhealthy, or lack self-control. Weight bias can significantly impact people's lives, leading to discrimination in employment, education, and healthcare.

Body shaming – the act of criticizing or making negative comments about someone's body, shape, or size. It can be verbal, non-verbal, or written. Body shaming can greatly affect self-esteem, mental health, and overall well-being and stands in direct opposition to the principles of body liberation.

Fat shaming – the act of making derogatory comments about someone's weight or body size.about weight, and a lack of representation throughout the media.

Ableism – prejudice and discrimination against people with disabilities. It includes assumptions and attitudes that people with disabilities are less capable or less valuable. In the context of body liberation, it also includes the stereotype that fat people are less able and therefore less worthy.

Healthism – a belief system that places personal responsibility for health above all else. It often promotes a narrow view of "healthy behavior" and can lead to judgment or discrimination against those who do not conform. In body liberation, it refers to the assumption that fat people are inherently unhealthy and therefore less deserving.

Lookism – discriminatory treatment based on physical appearance, particularly when someone is perceived as falling short of conventional beauty standards.

Sizeism (body shape and size discrimination) – prejudice or unfair treatment based on body shape or size. This includes negative comments, lack of access to goods or services, employment discrimination, and inaccessible spaces. When directed specifically at fat people, it's referred to as fat discrimination.

Aesthetic violence – self-inflicted harm driven by internalised beauty standards, often expressed through extreme dieting, cosmetic surgery, or disordered behavior in the pursuit of an ideal appearance.

Appearance-related violence – bullying or harassment based on physical appearance. This includes verbal abuse, negative commentary, or physical acts such as spitting or hair-pulling directed at someone's appearance.

Body policing – enforcing or promoting societal norms about how people should look or act. This can contribute to negative body image, disordered eating, and other forms of harm.

Diet culture – a pervasive belief system that equates thinness with health and value. It leads to self-criticism, disordered eating, and poor body image. Body liberation challenges these norms and promotes acceptance, compassion, and the right to exist in all bodies.

Thin privilege – the unearned advantages that come with having a body that aligns with societal standards of thinness. This includes social acceptance, easier access to clothing, and a lower likelihood, facing discrimination in healthcare, employment, or public spaces.

CONTACT & FEEDBACK

We are always eager to hear how this manual is being used, what impact it is making, and how it can grow. Whether you have implemented one of the activities, shared it with your team, or simply have reflections to offer — we welcome your thoughts. If you use any part of this publication, please let us know how it went! Your feedback will help us to improve future resources and continue supporting inclusive youth work across Europe.

Email: mail@bodyliberation.eu
Website: www.bodyliberation.eu
Tag your work with: #BodyLiberationEU

This publication was developed by three organisations within the Body Liberation Network:
Flourish NGO, DAFI, and CIM Horyzonty.

Together, we are committed to challenging weight stigma and creating more inclusive, compassionate spaces for all bodies.

This manual is a call to action for youth workers, educators, and activists who want to challenge body-based oppression and build spaces where all bodies are valued, seen, and free. Rooted in body liberation, it offers tools, practices, and ideas to confront fatphobia, weight stigma, and appearance-based discrimination—starting with youth work.

We believe all bodies are worthy.
We believe in inclusion, equity, autonomy, and justice.

www.bodyliberation.eu
mail@bodyliberation.eu

We represent a movement that challenges systems that shame, exclude, and control our bodies. With this manual, we aim to push body shape and size discrimination into the heart of the European Youth Work Agenda.

WE BELIEVE ALL BODIES ARE WORTHY. WE BELIEVE IN INCLUSION, EQUITY, AUTONOMY, AND JUSTICE.

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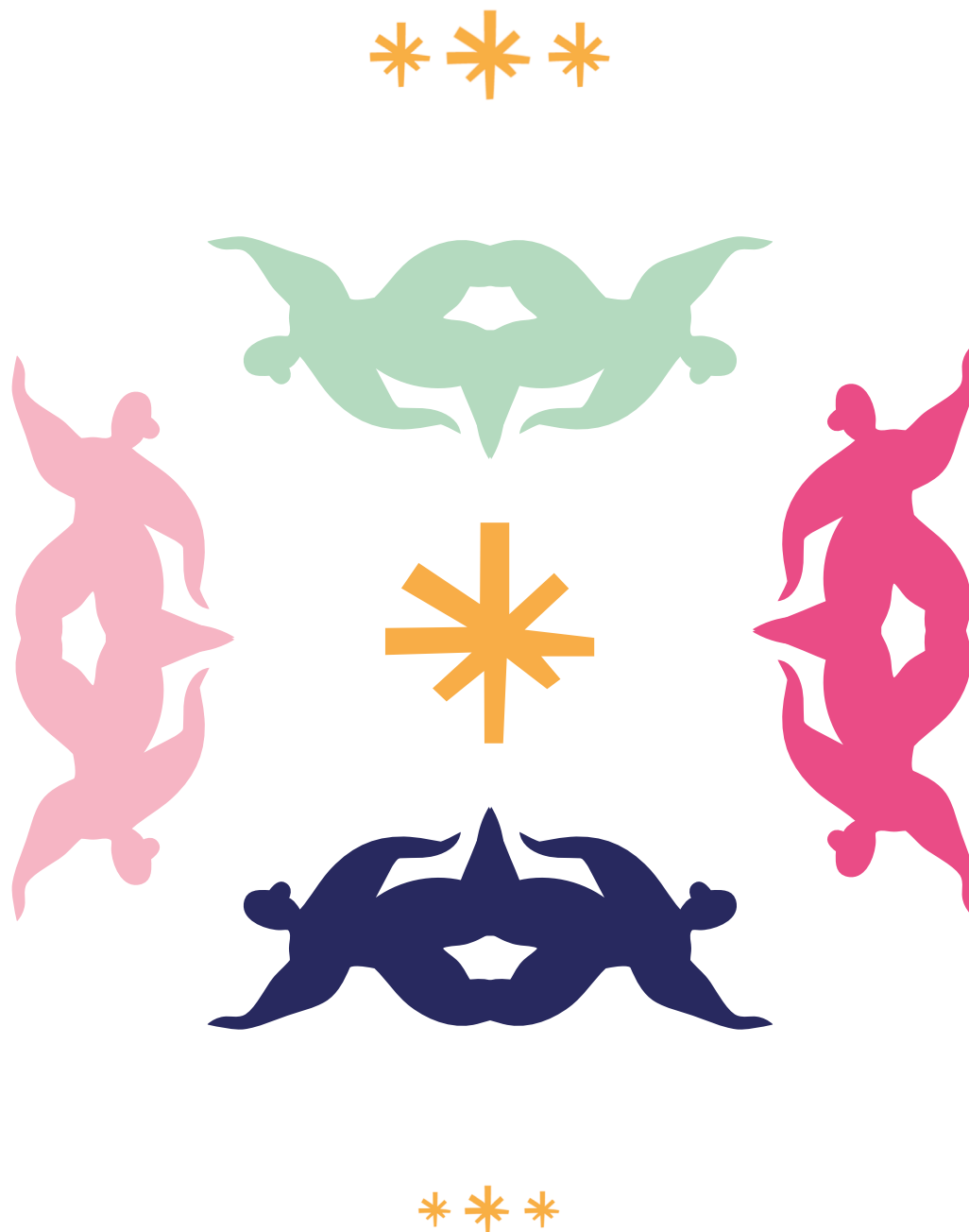
ALL BODIES BELONG.
ALL BODIES ARE POLITICAL.
ALL BODIES DESERVE LIBERATION.

This is not the final word—it's a starting point. We invite you to read, reflect, act, and organise.

BODY LIBERATION