

## Overview

Now in its second year, Butterfly Foundation's BodyKind Youth Survey provides a nationwide glimpse into the levels of body satisfaction and body image experiences of a large sample of young people living in Australia aged 12 to 18 years.

Overall, the findings of the BodyKind Youth Survey 2023 suggest that body dissatisfaction continues to affect a significant proportion of young people in Australia. More than half of all young people reported being dissatisfied with how their body looks. While young people in all demographic groups are experiencing body dissatisfaction, females, gender diverse and LGB+ young people are still reporting the highest levels; however, a greater proportion of males reported a high level of body dissatisfaction in this year's survey compared with 2022 (see male snapshot for further information).

More than two thirds of respondents wished they were thinner/leaner, and more muscular. Compared with 2022 findings, 2023 respondents reported a

statistically greater desire for thinness/leanness, which may be due to the higher proportion of female respondents this year. On average, respondents reported feeling 'rarely' or 'sometimes' positive about their bodies. Poorer body appreciation was related to a greater desire for thinness/leanness, life disengagement and dissatisfaction with how social media made young people feel about their body.

The impact on young people's lives is also evident. Consistent with 2022, body dissatisfaction limited young people's involvement in sport, social activities and speaking up about what matters to them. For almost a third of young people body image frequently impacted their ability to focus on schoolwork and willingness to raise their hand in the classroom, and for nearly a quarter of respondents their school attendance.

When exploring some of the known risk factors for body dissatisfaction, it was found that the majority (77.7%) of young people have experienced appearance-related teasing. Consistent with 2022 findings teasing most frequently occurred

at school and so it is not surprising that 88.8% of young people want schools to do more to stop it.

Young people were also asked about their social media use and its impact on their body image. More than 60% reported that social media made them feel dissatisfied with their body, but despite this, just over half of social media users reported never or rarely unfollowing pages or people that made them feel bad about their bodies. It was not surprising to hear that the vast majority of young people want social media platforms to take more responsibility for helping young people have a more positive body image.

Across the two years of the survey, young people have consistently called for more body image support at school, at both primary and secondary levels. Young people reported wanting more resources to support those struggling with their body image, including content delivered by people who have overcome their own body dissatisfaction, and having body image content as part of their classroom curriculum.

## Who participated?

**2942 respondents**

(12-18 years)

83.2% Female

11.7% Male

2.6% Non-Binary

1.6% Other gender term

2.1% Aboriginal and/  
or Torres Strait Islander

25% LGB+\*

All Australian states and  
territories represented



\*Young people who identified as gay/lesbian, bisexual and those identifying under a term not listed.

## How satisfied are young people with how their body looks?

### More than half (56.5%) of young people reported being dissatisfied with how their body looks.

More than 1 in 3 (38.4%) reported being mostly or completely dissatisfied with how their body looks.

Some level of body dissatisfaction was reported by approximately 65% of respondents from the LGB+ community, while 45% reported a high level of body dissatisfaction.

Body dissatisfaction was highest for 13- (63.9%) and 14-year-olds (62.8%). Similar rates of body dissatisfaction

were found across the other ages with 52-57% reporting some level of body dissatisfaction.

More than half of males (57.9%) reported some level of body satisfaction compared with 33.1% of females and 18.4% of non-binary young people.

## To what extent do young people appreciate their bodies?

### Over a third of young people never or rarely feel good in their body

Nearly a quarter reported never or rarely respecting their body.

Nearly half of young people never or rarely feel comfortable with their body.

## Are young people being kind to their bodies?

### Nearly 7 in 10 young people reported never/rarely talking to someone if they were not feeling good about their body/appearance.

On the other hand,

Most reported often or always valuing other people for who they are rather than how they look (76.5%).

Around 8 in 10 said they avoided saying unkind things about other people's bodies or appearance.

Just over 70% surround themselves with people who like me for who I am, rather than how I look.

## How concerned are young people about their body image?

### More than 95% of young people had some level of concern.

Almost one in two (46.4%) young people reported a high level of concern about their body image, which is somewhat higher than 2022 survey findings (38.3%).

Young people who identified as non-binary (53%) and female (47.9%) reported a high level of concern about their body image.

A similar proportion of young people who identified as heterosexual, gay/lesbian and bisexual reported a high level of concern about their body image (>45% very or extremely concerned).

12-year-olds were the least concerned about their body image, while 15-year-olds were the most concerned (with 53.3% reporting a high level of concern).

## What are the body ideals of young people?

### 78.1% of young people wished they were thinner/leaner\*.

Those who identified as female (76.5%), non-binary (76.5%) and preferred a different gender term (75%) reported a greater desire for thinness/leanness compared with males (32.7%).

Over 77% of young people in the LGB+ community reported a desire to be thinner/leaner, compared with 68.5% of heterosexual young people.

Desire for thinness/leanness peaked at age 13, with 80.9% wanting to be thinner/leaner.

*\*Sample mean responses indicated a significantly greater desire for thinness/leanness than the 2022 sample.*

### 71.3% of young people wished they were more muscular.

No significant differences for desire for muscularity were apparent across age and sexuality groups.

Desire for muscularity was high amongst all gender groups, but males (82.4%) and those who preferred a different gender term (88.6%) reported a greater desire to be more muscular.

Over 69% of females desired to be more muscular.

## How does body image impact young people?

**Around 50% of young people said their body image had stopped them to some extent from raising their hand in class, focusing on school work and going to school.**

Feelings about their body had also stopped young people 'quite a bit' or 'all the time' from:

- Going to the beach (46.6%)
- Going shopping for clothes (43.2%)
- Doing a physical activity/sport (36.6%)
- Giving an opinion or standing up for themselves (37.4%)

**8 in 10 agreed social media platforms need to do more to help young people have a positive body image.**

## The impact of social media on young people's body image.

**Almost two third (61.7%) of respondents said social media made them feel dissatisfied with their bodies.**

There was a relationship between young people reporting that social media made them feel more dissatisfied about their bodies and desire to be thinner/leaner, poorer body appreciation and greater life disengagement.

The reported impact of social media on body dissatisfaction was less for males (26.4%) compared with over 55% of other genders.

Over a third of young people reported never or rarely seeing their bodies represented on social media.

## What is young people's experience of appearance-related teasing?

**Over 7 in 10 young people have received negative comments or been teased about their appearance.**

**Appearance-teasing was:**

frequent across all ages, with 73-83% of young people reporting ever having been teased.

frequent across all genders, but was more frequently reported by non-binary young people (90.9%) and less so by males (59.4%).

frequent across all sexualities with 74-87% of young people reporting ever having been teased.

**77% reported that they experienced teasing at school.**

The other most frequently reported locations for appearance-teasing were:

- At home (37.8%)
- On social media (33.4%)
- At family events (30.1%)

## Are young people Being Body Kind Online? \*

**75.2% reported never or rarely taking a break from social media because it was affecting how they felt about their bodies.**

The same percentage of young people (75.2%) said they never or rarely unfollowed pages or people that made them feel bad about their bodies.

40.7% reported they never or rarely posted unfiltered or unedited photos of themselves.

**On the other hand:**

- Over 7 in 10 reported often or always commenting kindly and honestly on friends' posts.
- 34.1% reported often or always taking action against appearance bullying and teasing online.

Overall, 12-year-olds (30.5%) were least likely to be engaging in media literacy strategies to support their body image.

*\*Practicing media literacy and self-care strategies to support their own and other people's body image.*

## What do young people think about schools and body image?

**8 in 10 agreed primary schools should do more to support positive body image and 9 in 10 agreed secondary schools should do more.**

Nearly 9 out of 10 agreed that:  
those working in schools should be trained in how to support body image (88.5%).  
more resources should be provided at schools for anyone struggling with body image (89%).  
schools need to do more to stop bullying and teasing around appearance (88.8%).

Young people's top 3 preferences for delivery of school based body image education were:

delivery by a person who has overcome their own body dissatisfaction (44.7%).  
included in normal lessons as part of the curriculum (39.1%).

delivery by other young people who have been trained (35.6%).



## What ways do young people want to receive information about body image?

**46.4% thought social media was the best way for young people to get information about body image.**

The other most frequently indicated responses were:

- other young people more generally (40.2%).
- programs or talks in schools (38.2%)
- other people who have overcome serious body image concerns (37.8%)
- school counsellor/student wellbeing team (36.8%)

## What can parents and family members do in home settings?



Support your child to develop a positive relationship with their body, eating and physical activity early in life.



Learn about body image and how you can be a positive body image role model for your child. If you need support – it's never too late.



It is important that parents of gender diverse and LGBTQIA+ young people are aware of their increased risk of body dissatisfaction.



Foster a BodyKind home environment where all bodies are respected and accepted. Make your home a safe place for your child to thrive in their body.



When setting up social media accounts for your child, know the platforms yourself and teach them the safety feature tips and tricks.



Empower and support your child to develop social media literacy skills so they can source helpful, and filter out harmful body image, and health information, online.



Adopt a zero-tolerance to appearance teasing in your home. Avoid nicknames that body shame, embarrass or reinforce body ideals.



Reduce appearance talk and compliments within your home – use positive language when describing all bodies and encourage extended family to do the same.



Learn the warning signs of body dissatisfaction, disordered eating and eating disorders so you can act early if concerned about your child.

### Butterfly resources to support parents/families:

Butterfly Body Bright Families (U12)



BodyKind Families (13+)



Butterfly Education Services



Butterfly National Helpline



To access the full 2023 BodyKind Youth Survey Report:  
[www.butterfly.org.au/YouthSurveyFindings](http://www.butterfly.org.au/YouthSurveyFindings)  
E: [education@butterfly.org.au](mailto:education@butterfly.org.au)

Butterfly National Helpline  
[www.butterfly.org.au/helpline](http://www.butterfly.org.au/helpline)