

# BODY IMAGE PLEDGE HANDBOOK

BE REAL

BODY CONFIDENCE FOR EVERYONE



# INTRODUCTION

This handbook has been designed to accompany the *Body Image Pledge*, which calls for the responsible portrayal of body image in advertising, fashion, music and the media industries.

It's intended as a handy reference to help organisations interpret and adopt the Body Image Pledge's four principles:

1. **Reflect Diversity**
2. **Reflect Reality**
3. **Promote Health & Wellbeing**
4. **Promote the Pledge**

Comprehensive guidance, with extensive examples of best practice and full discussion of body image hot topics can be found on the Be Real website at [BeRealCampaign.co.uk](http://BeRealCampaign.co.uk).

We are aware that many organisations and individuals want to be positive in portraying body image, but are unsure of how and where to start. This handbook recognises these challenges and offers practical and constructive advice and support.

## Building on existing industry codes

Advertising regulations state that marketing communications should be legal, decent, honest and truthful and that they should be prepared with a sense of responsibility to consumers and society. They should also take account of prevailing standards and avoid misleading people or causing harm, especially to children.

However, there is no obligation in the industry codes that regulate advertising, fashion, music or the media to reflect positively how people really look. The [Body Image Pledge](#) seeks to address this issue.

The [Body Image Pledge](#) seeks to help and support industry. It provides clarity on body image portrayal specifically and what is needed for cultural and behavioural change. The [Toolkit](#) backs up the [Pledge](#) with specific guidance, best practice examples and case studies.

## Have your say!

The [Body Image Pledge](#) guidance will always be a work-in-progress and we will continually update our website to illustrate the latest in best practice. To do this we want to hear from you, so if there is good work you would like to see promoted, get in touch with us at [BeReal@ymca.org.uk](mailto:BeReal@ymca.org.uk).

# PRINCIPLE 1: REFLECT DIVERSITY

Communications, as appropriate, should reflect the UK population's diverse range of body shapes and sizes, skin tones, ages, genders, ethnicities, disfigurements, abilities and disabilities.

## Intention

It's socially responsible to be inclusive.

Broadening cultural ideals of beauty by using a more diverse range of body types in advertising, fashion, music and the media, will help more of us to identify with popular images and so view our own bodies more positively.

When we feel better about ourselves, we're more likely to make healthy choices, such as exercising regularly and eating well.

"Communications" means the totality of an organisation's advertising, marketing, communications, promotions, sponsorships, events or sales activity in any medium, including digital media (e.g. social media) and in-store displays and products.

It also includes any form of editorial and accompanying imagery in any medium.



## Best practice

*“The Dove Real Beauty Campaign”* set the standard for the Body Image Pledge in its portrayal of people, working with real women of all shapes, sizes and ethnicities.



## Top tips

1. Undertake an audit of your communications to see how they compare with best practice and invite your staff and suppliers to contribute to a plan to address any areas of potential change.
2. Ensure your organisation is aware of the UK's diversity. Use it to reflect society's broad view of beauty and enhance your appeal to a wider audience.
3. Consider using customers and real people in some of your campaigns rather than professional models.

## PRINCIPLE 2: REFLECT REALITY

1. Images should show people as they are in real life, with alterations limited to technical corrections, such as light or deleting stray hairs.
2. Images should show what is realistically attainable for most people from using the products or services promoted.

### Intention

The gap between the average consumer and the 'unrealistic, unattainable and perfect' appearance ideals presented by the advertising, fashion, music and media industries are a major contributor to body image dissatisfaction. It has been shown that the typical industry 'ideal' of young, thin white women and muscular men is highly unrepresentative and cannot be realistically attained by 95% of the population.

The **Body Image Pledge** is therefore seeking to ensure that industry uses images that are authentic and realistic.

### Best practice

#### *Debenhams' airbrushing policy*

In 2013, Debenhams revealed common industry practice, announcing it would only airbrush minor things like pigmentation and stray hair.

## Top tips

1. Read the APPG Report and subsequent studies from the Government Equalities Office and Centre for Appearance Research to understand the extent of the problem caused by the use of unrealistic and enhanced images.
2. Review your own policies and those of any agencies you may use. If necessary create your own airbrushing policy having regard for the best practice cases that already exist.
3. Create a customer advisory panel from members of the public to provide feedback on the use of images in your communications.



## PRINCIPLE 3: PROMOTE HEALTH AND WELLBEING

1. Models should be healthy and age-appropriate.
2. Emphasis should be placed on health and wellbeing not weight or appearance.

### Intention

The use of models implicitly seeks to set a standard to which others will aspire. Consequently, the use of healthy models is intended not only to protect the models themselves, but also to provide role models of good health who will encourage the public to pursue healthy physical goals.

Images of young models, whose bodies conform to thin 'ideals' that are often impossible for adult models to attain through healthy behaviours, can encourage unhealthy weight management.



I'm slow but  
everyone on



Above all the **Body Image Pledge** seeks to encourage the communication of people's holistic value, emphasising their health and wellbeing. It aims to end judgment of people based on their weight and appearance and the potentially discriminatory and damaging remarks that typically follow.

## Best practice

*Sport England: "This Girl Can"*

The role model for emphasising health and wellbeing.

## Top tips

1. All organisations involved in creating a communication should consider the health and wellbeing of models and collectively take steps to satisfy themselves that the models they use are healthy and age-appropriate before employing them.
2. Take a holistic approach to health and wellbeing and avoid using size, shape, weight or body composition as the sole determinants of health.
3. Use images and descriptions of success that are varied, balanced, based on health, wellbeing and achievement and employ ambassadors and spokespeople who follow good health practice.



I'm lapping  
the couch.

## PRINCIPLE 4: PROMOTE THE PLEDGE

1. Promote and advocate the **Body Image Pledge**; encouraging others to adopt its principles and follow responsible body image practice.
2. Educate and train staff in responsible body image practice as defined by the **Pledge**.

### Intention

The **Body Image Pledge** is intended to be the recognised benchmark for best practice in body image portrayal and consumers will be encouraged to buy from those businesses that adopt its principles. Publicly adopting and promoting the **Pledge** will offer competitive advantage to early adopters; ultimately it should become an essential industry standard.

Businesses are encouraged to promote the **Body Image Pledge** through all points of contact, from customer communications to stakeholder and supplier management and industry events.

The **Body Image Pledge** intends to help create best practice businesses, with staff who develop body confident products and services as a matter of course; who make suppliers aware of their responsibilities and who live body confident lives.

## Best practice

### YMCA

YMCA, the world's largest and oldest charity for children and young people, offers an accredited qualification in Body Image Training through YMCA Awards, as well as Best Practice Internal Guidelines for its staff, volunteers and suppliers.



## Top tips

1. Share the [Body Image Pledge](#) with staff, suppliers and customers and encourage them to participate in defining best practice for your business.
2. Let your customers know that you are supporting the [Body Image Pledge](#). Promote any policies or campaigns that encourage positive body image clearly, so people know that you are a brand that is doing something about this issue.
3. Bring the [Body Image Pledge](#) to work: a body confident workforce is healthier, happier and more productive. Help your staff to take a long-term approach to health and wellbeing.

**BE REAL**

BODY CONFIDENCE FOR EVERYONE

[BeRealCampaign.org.uk](http://BeRealCampaign.org.uk)

---

10-11 Charterhouse Square

London

EC1M 6EH

[BeReal@ymca.org.uk](mailto:BeReal@ymca.org.uk)