A HANDBOOK ON
BUILDING A
POSITIVE
BODY IMAGE
BECAUSE YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL.

the red elephant foundation
What are body shapes?

The human body shape is a complex phenomenon with advanced detail and function. Body shape is the external form derived from the skeletal structure of a body.

It’s decided by one’s genes and cannot be pre-decided or controlled. It’s the shape one is born in and comes into over the years. The external bodily form is further decided by other factors such as skeletal muscles, activity, nutrition and life. It can evolve with time and experience.

Body shape also stands for variations - the diverse range of bodies that exist. It is a word that encompasses our differences and empowers us to thrive because of them.
Our bodies are essentially the same in terms of what they have: limbs, organs and organ systems. But, they are still different in the way the body is shaped. Body Shapes are a result of many different factors: it depends on how the skeletal structures are moulded, how the fat and muscles are distributed, how the person’s genetic structures impact them, ethnicity, race and even the impact of the region or part of the world the person has been born in!

People are shaped differently because all these factors come together to create a body structure that is distinct, unique and natural. Each of us have a certain kind of metabolic structure, muscle structure and fat structure. What we do with our bodies will then determine how healthy we are - if we make sure to take care of ourselves and care for our bodies without harming ourselves through judgment and neglect, we can actually be really happy and healthy!

There are three main body types, according to science. However, most people have characteristics of two or even all three of the body types. So, like gender, body types are also incredibly fluid! The three body types are:

**Ectomorphs**: where the body is long and lean and has little body fat and muscle. It’s usually hard for them to gain weight because their metabolism tends to be high.

**Endomorphs**: where the body has lots of fat and muscle. It’s usually easy for them to gain weight easily and they have rounder, curvier bodies.

**Mesomorphs**: where the body is athletic, strong and can gain and lose weight without much of an effort.
What is body shaming?

#1
Body shaming refers to the “action or practice of humiliating someone by making mocking or critical comments about their body shape or size.”

#2
We often find people insulting others for their size and shape - someone or the other is called out for being “too thin” or “too fat.”

#3
Sometimes, it takes place subtly - such as criticizing a person’s dressing sense by saying that a certain outfit is not suited for their size.

#4
Body-shaming can manifest itself in many ways. But, they fall under one or more of three different categories.

#5
Type 1: Criticizing your own appearance, through a judgment or comparison to another person.

#6
Type 2: Criticizing another’s appearance in front of them by making judgments or comparisons to another person.

#7
Type 3: Criticizing another’s appearance without their knowledge by making judgments or comparisons to another person.

#8
In every way in which it manifests, body shaming leads to comparison and shame. It is hurtful and leaves a person feeling bad.

#9
Body shaming constantly perpetuates the idea that people should be judged mainly for their physical features.
why is body shaming a problem?

# 1
Body shaming as an attitude of perception creates a culture where undue importance is placed on the physical body. This leads to high stress levels.

# 2
It systematically ignores the talents and abilities of a person and forces them and others around them to pay attention to their body alone.

# 3
With internalised or externally highlighted doubts about their body, one starts ignoring their possibilities and stresses about body shape/size.

# 4
Body shaming causes compromise of talents of the individual which could otherwise have been utilised very productively.

# 5
Body shaming negatively affects the employability of those outside the spectrum of 'normal' body, making life difficult and stressful.

# 6
The stressed person may resort to unsafe means of 'correcting' their body, or may indulge in unhealthy eating habits, affecting their health.

# 7
Body shaming affects different genders, ages, and people with varied abilities in different ways, depending on their particular situation.

# 8
In every way in which it manifests, body shaming leads to comparison and shame. It is hurtful and leaves a person feeling bad.

# 9
It shifts the focus from a healthy body to a body defined by arbitrary rules leading to emphasis on appearance more than the experience of being.
How does our language contribute to a culture of body shaming?

# 1
There are two types of language we use, propagated both by the media and regular conversation that contribute towards body-shaming.

# 2
Words like ‘fat’, ‘ugly’ and ‘dark’ come up when people talk about others or themselves. These are by no means absolutes. Every human is unique!

# 3
The second form are comparisons that sound like “My body is not as toned as hers” or “I wish my thighs were like “insert popular celebrity’s name”

# 4
No matter what language is used, the person it is directed at might feel a drop in their self-esteem and end up more body conscious.

# 5
Here are some tips on how you can try to prevent the everyday language you use from becoming a tool of causing hurt or body-shaming.

# 6
Be aware of your conduct. The next time you comment on someone’s body image, try to think why you are doing so.

# 7
Do you actually feel something negative about them which you are channeling into this behaviour? Find a way to engage within and nip the tendency to hurt in the bud.

# 8
Spend time with body-positive people. There are some who absolutely celebrate themselves for who they are, so why don’t you converse with them and learn about their perspectives?

# 9
Identify one thing you love about your body. Sometimes, we might be guilty of body-shaming ourselves. Once you identify them in yourself, maybe you might be able to do the same for others.
THE TRUTH IS THAT ALL SHAPES AND SIZES ARE BEAUTIFUL
how can we be better allies and end body shaming?

#1 Stop equating and reducing beauty and appearance-superlative to body shape and size.

#2 Stop making fat about feelings. It is a body size and not a basis for discrimination.

#3 Avoid shaming anyone for their lifestyle. Help build sustainable lives, without shaming.

#4 If you feel like you have concerns and want to share them, be empathetic. Stop, before you judge.

#5 Avoid dictating what one looks good wearing. Clothes are an up to one's own choices and comfort.

#6 Avoid concern-trolling. Acting concerned and judging bodies is fat-shaming.

#7 Remember: fat people can be healthy. Skinny people can be unhealthy. Health is not always a direct function of size.

#8 Avoid imposing diet talk on another individual - do not use diet talk to subtly insinuate room for body shaming of another.

#9 Be empathetic instead of passing judgment, just because someone looks a certain way doesn't mean they are unhealthy.
How do we address internalised body shaming?

1. If we can stop unwittingly shaming ourselves for our bodies, we are doing ourselves a great service.

2. Sometimes, we’re so unaware that we do body-shame ourselves, that it is almost an unconscious activity.

3. Shaming happens unconsciously because our standards of beauty have been heavily internalized.

4. Be assertive. If you find your mind going against your interests and shaming you, start by affirming positively.

5. Identify body-positive or even body-neutral friends to surround yourself with. Positive thoughts are the best!

6. Engage with those who perpetuate body-shaming and tell them how you feel. Be open and share how you feel.

7. Do things you like! If you like to dance, learn a skill, play a sport - do it! Nothing is a function of your body shape or size.

8. Don’t let someone else’s ideas define what you can and cannot do because of your body shape or size.

9. Dress as you like! Don’t let someone else’s ideas of fashion define what you can and cannot wear.
YOU MATTER.
YOU ARE AMAZING.
YOU COUNT.
YOU ARE MORE THAN
A BODY SHAPE OR A
BODY SIZE.