

Dear Educators,

My name is Kylie Burton.

I am a former teacher and the lead parent advocate of the successful “Bye Bye BMI” campaign. This year-long collaboration between myself, Eating Disorders Families Australia (EDFA) and The Embrace Collective, (Dr Zali Yager and Taryn Brumfitt, 2023 Australian of the Year) led to the inclusion of eating disorder prevention guidelines, safety considerations and resources for teachers, that were published in the Australian Curriculum v9, in November 2023.

The updated resources in the [Curriculum connection: Food and Wellbeing](#) outline some key changes to the delivery of health, food and nutrition messaging in schools, to prevent unintentionally causing harm to students at risk of, or in treatment for, eating disorders. These updates have been informed by eating disorder experts and lived experience families, and are supported by the latest research.

Eating disorders are serious mental illnesses, and research is showing that they are becoming more prevalent in Australia. This used to be a secondary school problem, but it is now something that we are also seeing in primary schools.

- There are [1.1 Million](#) people living with an eating disorder in Australia.
- [27% of people](#) living with an eating disorder are 19 years old or younger.
- Eating disorders [have doubled](#) among children aged 5-13 years since 2005.
- In 2023, there were [1,273 known deaths](#) from an eating disorder in Australia, more than our National Road toll.
- [US](#) and [Canadian](#) research has revealed that 14% of patients being admitted to treatment for an eating disorder specifically mentioned food and nutrition education as a significant trigger for their illness.

Through our [“Bye Bye BMI”](#) campaign, we are committed to continuing to share the details of these Curriculum changes and the attached resources, in order to minimize the risk of harm to students.

We understand that the implementation of The Australian Curriculum v9 is being rolled out at different times in each jurisdiction. Regardless of which curriculum your state or territory is currently following, it is now widely documented that certain classroom activities about food, nutrition, bodies, measurement, and health are not safe. This is an issue that is affecting many students and families across the country.

We are sharing this letter with you so that you are aware of the latest evidence-based information and resources your school can access, in order to take immediate steps to mitigate the risk to students. We encourage you to familiarise yourself with these documents, and support teachers to remove and revise classroom content and school activities that do not align with these updated guidelines. Evidence of problematic content has been found in Maths, English, Science, Design and Technology, and Health and Physical Education, so attention across all curriculum areas is required. Harmful weighing practices, body commentaries and diet advice has also been reported in extra-curricular dance and sport.

We know there are many reasons why someone might develop an eating disorder. Minimising triggering classroom content will help to reduce some of these incidents. Whilst teaching about food, nutrition and wellbeing in schools

is challenging, research now shows that moving to an approach that is free from shame and judgement around bodies and food is more likely to safeguard and support *all* young people, to achieve optimal health and wellbeing.

We believe educators want the best for their students and teachers can feel confident that more research and specific resources are currently being developed to support them. We continue to meet regularly with Education Ministers and Education Department Wellbeing Specialists as we work together to implement these guidelines in all Australian schools. Educators play a crucial role in the health and wellbeing of young people, and we believe these guidelines will have a significant impact on eating disorder prevention in Australia for decades to come.

Yours sincerely,

Kylie Burton

K.Burton.Education@gmail.com



Supported by Jane Rowan, Eating Disorders Families Australia, and

Dr Zali Yager, The Embrace Collective.

SUMMARY OF RESOURCES TO IMPROVE EATING DISORDER SAFETY IN SCHOOLS

The [Curriculum connection: Food and Wellbeing](#) has been updated to include guidelines and resources that enhance student safety.

In summary, the curriculum changes that have been made include:

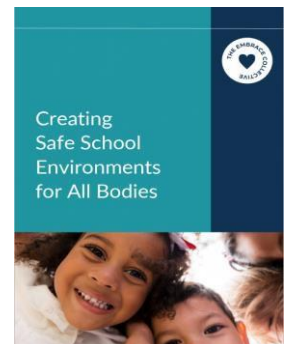
1. Changes to language throughout version 9 of The Australian Curriculum. Over 340 references to Body Mass Index (BMI), weight, calories, food, and diet have been removed or replaced with a new focus on 'balanced nutrition' and 'strategies to maintain and enhance individual and community health and wellbeing'. These changes focus on health, rather than weight, reducing potential triggers for all staff and students, especially those with body image concerns or eating disorders.
2. Teachers are now advised to **avoid** the following:

What to avoid	Why avoid
<p>Critiquing and comparing personal food and wellbeing choices and habits with those of other people, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • calculating kilojoules/calories • assessing body weight and body measurements • calculating BMI (Body Mass Index); and • recording food intake in food diaries. 	<p>When developing knowledge, skills and attitudes to establish and maintain positive health behaviours, the varied and individual dietary, nutritional and medical requirements of <i>all</i> students needs should be considered.</p> <p>These activities introduce dieting and disordered eating behaviours and may lead to feelings of shame and guilt in relation to bodies and weight that are associated with poor physical and mental health outcomes.</p> <p>Tasks that require students to research diets or eating disorders are not recommended, as they can lead students to harmful content online that may encourage dangerous dieting practices.</p>
<p>Focusing on constant improvement for <i>all</i> students to be engaging in 'healthier' eating practices.</p> <p>When discussing food, the term "balanced nutrition" to enhance and maintain health and wellbeing is preferred.</p>	<p>The constant pressure to be 'healthier' assumes and implies that students are not already eating in balanced, nutritious ways. Over-analysis of food choices and pressure to remove foods without assistance from a dietitian can lead to unnecessary and dangerous dietary restrictions that can lead to <i>ill</i>-health.</p>

<p>Categorising food into 'good' and 'bad' foods.</p> <p>Discussing the <i>function</i> of different foods is preferred (e.g. carbohydrates give us energy, protein builds muscle, etc), All food has <i>nutritional value</i>.</p>	<p>Labelling and categorising foods implies a <i>moral value</i> that can lead to feelings of shame and judgement around food and bodies. Food has many functions, including fuel, health and celebration. In addition, what is considered “healthy” for one student, may not be the case for another.</p>
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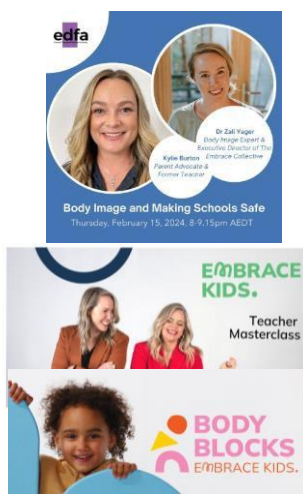
3. The following four links to resources have been provided, for teachers, support staff and families:

- National Eating Disorders Collaboration's [Eating Disorders in Schools](#) - Booklet about managing eating disorders in schools
- The Butterfly Foundation's [Modelling Healthy Body Image](#)
- The Embrace Collective's [Creating Safe School Environments for all Bodies](#)
- [Eating Disorders Families Australia](#) support for families and carers



We ask that you please access, read, and implement the changes articulated in the Curriculum Connections document. This may involve reviewing learning activities across all key learning areas in order to ensure that food and nutrition education is safe for all students.

The following resources are suggested to support further action on this issue.



Professional Learning Materials for Educators

- [Butterfly Foundation - Infographic - Fostering a Positive Body Image Environment](#)
- [Eating Disorders Families Australia Webinar - Body Image and Making Schools Safe](#) - A one-hour webinar explaining the updated Guidelines in the Australian Curriculum v9
- [The Embrace Collective - Teacher Masterclass](#) - A free, 15-minute masterclass that can be shown to all teachers in school staff meetings.
- [The Embrace Collective - Body Blocks](#) - Free, 30-minute modules for early childhood educators and teachers of children aged 0-8.

Body Image programs that are available for schools

- [The Embrace Collective](#) - Embrace Kids Classroom Program for Kids 10-14 years.
- [Butterfly Foundation - Programs for Schools](#) - Including Butterfly Body Bright for Primary Schools, and Body Kind for Secondary School students.
- [Media Smart](#) - 8-lesson program for upper primary and lower secondary students focusing on media literacy.



Thank you for your ongoing commitment to keeping our students safe, happy, and healthy.