

**EDUCATOR ANSWER KEY – THE PROS AND CONS OF COMPARISON**

Answers will vary from student to student. Here are some examples.

1. When people your age compare themselves to others, what do they tend to compare? Who do they compare against? Include comparisons that are obvious and subconscious, realistic and unrealistic.

What are they comparing? <i>e.g., Height</i>	Who do they compare against? <i>e.g., Siblings</i>
How good you are at sports	Media, professional sports players, Olympians, friends, peers, and siblings
Weight and Height	Media, models, actors, pop stars/singers, social media stars, friends, peers, and siblings
Fashion	Media, models, actors, pop stars/singers, social media stars, friends, and peers
Tattoos and piercings	Media, models, actors, pop stars/singers, social media stars, friends, peers, and siblings
Sexual and dating experiences	Media, friends, and peers
Body development	Friends, peers, and siblings
Grades	Friends, peers, and siblings



2. What are helpful ways that you make comparisons about yourself in relationship to others?

Grades

- Helpful to keep you motivated to do well in school.
- Unhelpful for your mental health or friendships. It can create stress and competition.

Sports

- Helpful to motivate you to build your skill.
- Unhelpful for your mental health or friendships. It can create stress and unhealthy competition or lead to injury.

## Tattoos

- Helpful because it inspires your art (whether on your body or on paper canvas).
- Unhelpful because it makes you feel peer pressured to get a tattoo (or get more tattoos) that you may not want.

## Sexual and dating experiences

- Helpful because it provides a gauge for what feels appropriate and/or in alignment with your values around dating, sex, sexuality, and relationships more broadly.
- Unhelpful because it makes you feel inferior and/or not normal and/or stressed/anxious about what is expected of you. This can particularly be the case if you are comparing sexual and dating experiences to popular movies or TV shows.

### 3. What are unhelpful ways that you make comparisons about yourself in relationship to others?

- Comparing your weight and height to anyone, whether they be friends, siblings, or models is not helpful. Every body is different not in ways you can see (how a body looks, grows, and moves) and in ways you can't see (like bones, muscles and tissue structure, metabolism, hormones, and genetic make-up). Even genetically related siblings can have very different looking (and feeling) bodies. Comparing height and weight is also unhelpful because it can make you feel anxious and stressed, impacting your mental health.
- Comparing fashion to friends, peers, and people you see online, in magazines, or movies can be fun and even helpful in terms of inspiring how you want to express yourself but it can also be unhelpful especially if you are constantly desiring clothing that you and/or your family cannot afford. Fitting into the latest fashion trends takes money, time, and energy and because the fashion industry supports and upholds a certain “beauty standard” and body type (skinny, able-bodied), it can be frustrating and taxing if you cannot find your size. It can become a draining, demoralizing, and shame-filled exercise (for more information on sizing and the fashion industry, see module 5.7).
- Comparing the ways your body is developing and going through puberty with people around you (e.g., your peers, friends, and siblings) can be an unhelpful and shame-filled experience. During adolescence, there is a lot of variation in the ways that people change physically (as well as emotionally and socially) that cannot be controlled or predicted. There is no “right way” to go through puberty but it is common to feel unhappy in comparison to others. For instance, someone who starts their menstrual cycle ahead of friends/peers might feel alone and embarrassed. Someone who starts their menstrual period later than friends/peers might feel really anxious or alone, like they are missing out. (For a comedic portrayal of this feeling of missing out, watch the HelloFlo *First Moon Party* video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NEcZmT0fiNM>).



4. How can you know when a certain comparison isn't realistic or useful?

- Comparisons with others can be helpful within a very particular set of circumstances. These circumstances include who you are comparing yourself to, the ways you respond to comparison, and the motivation behind your comparison. Most of the time however, comparisons with others are unhelpful because everybody has different bodies, different skills, different relationship desires, and different fashion styles and ways of physically expressing themselves.
- While most comparisons are unhelpful, some are more unrealistic than others. For instance, if you are new to a sport, is it more realistic to compare yourself to an Olympian or to someone else who is new at it?
- Students can ask themselves these questions when making a comparison to help assess how realistic and/or helpful each are: Does making this comparison contribute to my overall sense of well-being? Does making this comparison add any value to my life? Or alternatively, does it take away value from my life? How does this comparison make me feel?

