

# Feel-good research to help children with altered appearance

September 22 2016, by Caroline Gee

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Credit: University of Queensland

In a society that worships the body beautiful, life can be tough for children whose appearance has been altered by burns, trauma, illness or genetic conditions.

A new research collaboration led by The University of Queensland's Child Health Research Centre and funded by Queensland's Children's Hospital Foundation aims to help children with disfigurements feel better about themselves.

PhD student Caroline Gee said the study was using a web-based program originally developed to help adults who had appearance-related distress.

"The program for 12-17 year olds was designed by our British collaborators at the University of the West of England Centre for Appearance Research," Ms Gee said.

"It helps children face everyday situations with greater self-esteem and confidence by exploring common social scenarios such as going to the movies.

"It gives tips to help them feel more comfortable about looking 'different' and to deal with the negative attention they sometimes get from people about their appearance."

The study will look at existing practices to support children with appearance-altering conditions or injuries in clinical settings and then assess how effective the web-based program is at improving the body-esteem, social anxiety and social skills.

"This research will initially test the acceptability and feasibility of the web based program with the hopes for a [randomised controlled trial](#) which will compare outcomes of children who have access to traditional support with those who do the web-based program," Ms Gee said.

"Children allocated to the web-based support group will undertake the program over eight weeks, with assessments at the beginning, middle and end of the program to monitor their progress.

"This program was found to make a big difference to adults in the UK, and we hope that it will have similar benefits for Australian children."

The program will not replace formal counselling but will supplement and

support [children](#) in the gaps between treatment.

The University West of England Centre for Appearance Research is the world's largest research group that focuses on the role of appearance and body image in people's lives.

Researchers hope to start recruiting for the study this year. Children eligible to take part will include those with burns, cleft lip or palate and any other condition or injury which has altered their appearance.

Provided by University of Queensland

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