

Researchers evaluate impact of new film's message on children's and adults' body image, self-compassion

May 27 2024



2023 Australian of the Year Taryn Brumfitt during the making of "Embrace Kids." Credit: Flinders University

Unrealistic expectations about what our bodies should look

like—whether from the media, friends or family—make adults and children of all ages more vulnerable to body dissatisfaction, eating disorders and other mental health challenges.

In a new study [published](#) in *Body Image*, Flinders University experts assessing the program's usefulness in classrooms highlight the potential for the film "[Embrace Kids](#)," directed by 2023 Australian of the Year Taryn Brumfitt, to achieve large-scale improvements in body image in [young people](#) aged 9–14 years.

"The study gives promising preliminary evidence in support of the broad impact and reach of 'Embrace Kids' and points to its potential as a resource that could be safely delivered at scale, at minimal cost," says Philippa Granfield, from the Embrace Impact Lab at Flinders University.

"Young people, as well as the adults who accompanied them to screenings of 'Embrace Kids,' reported improved body image and self-compassion after watching the film. It motivated viewers of all ages to be kinder to themselves and others in social media.

"Importantly, it did all of this without making viewers more concerned about their appearance, which is sometimes a concern people have about body image interventions."

An Embrace Impact Lab evaluation of the Embrace Kids Classroom Program is under way at 20 schools in South Australia and Queensland, thanks to support from Flinders Foundation for the Year 7-8 study and Breakthrough Mental Health Research Foundation for the rollout in Year 5-6.

Associate Professor Ivanka Prichard, who co-founded the Embrace Impact Lab at Flinders University, says The Embrace Kids Classroom

Program—developed with support from Little Heroes Foundation—extended the film's messages, and has the potential to reach even more young people.

The program is aligned with the Australian Curriculum and includes five lessons that each begin with a brief clip from the "Embrace Kids" film (G rated) followed by interactive, evidence-based [learning activities](#).

"Future research will explore how the Classroom Program and film might work together to produce enduring benefits to body image, and set young people up for positive relationships with their bodies, before body image concerns take hold," says Associate Professor Prichard.

"Embrace Kids" stemmed from the success of the first film, for adults, which was also directed by Taryn Brumfitt, who says the new Flinders research confirms the "Embrace Kids" film is "engaging as well as safe and effective."

"After releasing Embrace, a film that has been seen by millions of people in more than 190 countries, the 'number one' piece of feedback we received was that people wished they had seen this when they were younger," says Brumfitt, co-executive director of The Embrace Collective.

"This new research is exciting because we knew we had made a film that was engaging and educating kids without them even knowing it! Having this sort of evidence proves that this film is as safe and effective as we had intended it to be, and it's out there doing good in the world."

"Embrace Kids" research advisor Dr. Zali Yager adds, "We brought together all of the research on 'what works' to help young people feel better about their bodies, and infused it into the film. It's great that this evaluation confirms the effectiveness of this approach—not only for

young people, but for their grown-ups too."

John Mannion, Breakthrough chief executive, says body image issues are "one of the major challenges facing young people today."

"Children's mental health and eating disorders are a paramount focus to Breakthrough ... so we are proud to work closely with Flinders University's Embrace Impact Lab to help determine how we can integrate and reinforce positive body image concepts effectively," says Mannion.

"By fostering understanding and promoting positive self-perception from an early age, we can make a significant difference in the mental well-being of our children, setting them up for a healthier, happier future."

Ross Verschoor, Flinders Foundation executive director, says there is an "urgent need to help Australian children embrace their body image and overcome the issues which negatively affect their physical health and mental well-being."

"The Flinders Foundation is committed to helping South Australian children get the best start in life so they can realize their full potential as healthy, happy adults," Verschoor says.

"That's why we're proud to work with Flinders University researchers and The Embrace Collective to tackle much-needed research so we can minimize young people's lifetime risk of issues like eating disorders, depression and anxiety."

More information: Philippa Granfield et al, A pre-post evaluation of the impact of the Embrace Kids film on children's and adults' body image and self-compassion, *Body Image* (2024). [DOI: 10.1016/j.bodyim.2024.101700](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2024.101700)

Provided by Flinders University

Citation: Researchers evaluate impact of new film's message on children's and adults' body image, self-compassion (2024, May 27) retrieved 26 June 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-05-impact-message-children-adults-body.html>

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