

# FLIP THE SCRIPT

Words that work to help you build better body image for you and your kids



**EMBRACE KIDS.**

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

In eulogies, words matter—just like they do in our everyday lives. Changing our language is the first step in changing how we think about bodies, weight and health, and even seemingly small changes can have a big impact.

This guide was created to support you in speaking about bodies, food and movement in more positive ways. Given that you are such a powerful role model for your kids, they will be listening and absorbing everything you say—even when you don't think they are! So it's important that we think carefully about the words that come out of our mouths.

By making small but powerful shifts in our language, we can help our young people develop a positive relationship with their bodies now and for the rest of their lives.

## Want more information?

All of our Embrace Kids resources are based on the latest research about what works to build better body image for young people.

To access all of our resources for parents, teachers and sports coaches, go to **bodyimageresources.com**. That way, you'll be the first to hear about all of the ways we can support you.

Follow us on Instagram and Facebook at **@theembracehub**

**If you need additional support in relation to body image concerns and eating disorders, phone the Butterfly Foundation Helpline on 1800 33 4673.**

# TALKING ABOUT BODIES

The way we talk about bodies and appearance matters. Start to become aware of how you speak about your own body and other people's. The focus should be on accepting and appreciating our bodies, and concentrating on what they can do rather than what they look like.

**Instead of...**



**Saying negative things about your body.**

"My tummy is so big because I had you and your brother in there!"

**Making compliments about appearance.**

"You are so thin/pretty/muscly/handsome!"

**Complimenting weight loss.**

"You look great, have you lost weight?"

**Talking about the need to lose weight as part of a new diet/fitness regimen.**

"I'm going to try that new fitness app to finally lose this baby weight."

**Try...**



**Reframing to talk about what your body can do, rather than what it looks like.**

"Yes, my tummy is soft and squishy, and that makes it much better for cuddling you." [Insert cuddles here]

**Complimenting people on personality, process and progress instead. We can say lovely things to people about how they look, as long as it's not the ONLY thing we compliment. When we make compliments solely about appearance, it reinforces the idea that the way we look is one of the most important things about us. This is especially relevant for kids, as they are learning about what makes them unique and special.**

"You are so thoughtful and organised—it's such a treat to get to spend time with you."

**Not mentioning it at all. When we highlight and talk about weight loss in others, this inadvertently reinforces the importance of thinness.**

"I haven't seen you in ages, how are you?"

**Talking about changing our food and movement behaviours in order to enhance health, not to change our bodies.**

"I'm going to try eating more fresh fruits and vegetables to see if that helps me feel like I have more energy."

## Instead of...

**Talking about weight loss for a certain event/deadline.**

"I need to lose 5kg before our holiday to fit into my swimsuit!"

**Talking about feeling 'fat'.**

"I feel so fat today."

**Using words like 'overweight' and 'obese'.**

"An obese lady came in to work today."

**Any teasing or commentary about appearance.**

[While tickling] "Ah, you're getting so chubby in here, aren't you?"

"Let's see what Big Ears Betty has to say about that."

**Saying negative things or making jokes about your own appearance.**

"I've got more rolls than a bakery!"

## Try...

**Role modelling that we don't need to look a certain way to enjoy our holidays, or go to the beach or pool.**

"I've just tried on my swimsuit and it doesn't feel good on my body anymore—I'm off to the shops to buy one that does!"

**Avoiding negative connotations of the word 'fat'— try to keep it as neutral as possible. It's OK that you don't feel great in your body sometimes, but it's important to watch how we talk about it when we're feeling like this.**

"I'm not feeling so good in my body today —I'm going to go for a walk to get my blood pumping so I feel a bit less blah! Do you want to come?"

**Changing up your language, as these medical terms are very stigmatising. If you really have to refer to body size, you could use 'person in a larger body'.**

"A lady came in to work today—she was really lovely."

**Having a zero-tolerance policy against any commentary about appearance, body weight, size and shape, or other physical features.**

**A good guide is:** Unless the person can change the thing you want to comment on in 30 seconds, you shouldn't mention it. So "You've got something in your teeth" is fine, but "What's wrong with your skin?" (when they have a skin condition) is not.

**Making comments or jokes that have nothing to do with appearance. Self-deprecating humour, particularly about our appearance, is deeply entrenched in Australian culture, but it's not helpful.**

"Watch out, Dad joke incoming!"

# TALKING ABOUT FOOD

We want our kids to build a positive relationship with food—to listen to their bodies, and follow their innate hunger and fullness cues. To do this, we need to role model trusting the messages our body is sending us, like the messages that we are hungry or full, and making food choices for a wide range of reasons—to celebrate, connect with loved ones, or simply for pleasure and enjoyment.

## Instead of...

Using labels like 'junk/bad/unhealthy food' and 'healthy/good food'.

"Stop eating all of that JUNK!"

Talking about changing what you eat to change your body.

"Mummy is eating lettuce because I need to do something about this."  
[While wobbling stomach]

Implying that you have to control or 'work off' your food.

"You're going to have to run twice as far to work off that chocolate cake!"

## Try...

Avoiding the categorisation of food as 'good' or 'bad' as it gives food a moral value and can set kids up to feel guilt in relation to eating particular foods. There are no good or bad foods—all food is just food, and it fuels our body to do all the things we love.

When we talk about food, we can encourage young people to focus on the most nutritious foods—the ones that contain lots of useful nutrients to help us grow and thrive.

Just call food what it is: chips, strawberries, chocolate, pasta, pineapple.

"This toastie will give you lots of energy to play after lunch!"

Talking about the many reasons why we eat food and enjoy different foods. If you want to talk about the changes you are making, make it about health, not weight.

"I just love how all of these colourful veggies make me feel—can you hear this crunch?" or  
"I just bought these lovely oranges, can you smell how juicy and sweet they are?"

Talking about listening to your body when it tells you that you've had enough, rather than restricting what you're eating in an attempt to change your body shape.

"That was so delicious, but my body is telling me I've had enough now!"

## Instead of... X

**Commenting on how much your kids are eating.**

“Are you eating again? You can’t still be hungry!”

**Making dessert or treats conditional on eating ‘healthy’ foods first.**

“No dessert until you’ve finished all your broccoli!”

## Try... ✓

**Trusting your kids to know when they’re full or if they’re still hungry.**

“I love that you’re listening to your body—we all go through times when we are hungrier than others. What does your body need right now?”

“Remember, sometimes it takes a moment for our tummy to register that it is actually full, so perhaps take a break and then see how it’s feeling in a little while.”

**Letting your kids decide what order they eat their food in, depending on how their body is feeling. We don’t want them to think that the nutritious foods need to be endured to get the ‘treat’ foods. This can be hard to reframe from your own upbringing, so just take it step by step.**

“Let’s focus on fuelling your body with as many nutrients as possible so you’ve got lots of energy today—do you want to start with a banana or some toast?”



# TALKING ABOUT MOVEMENT

Moving our bodies is fun and feels good. That's what we should be talking about with young people, not 'exercising' to punish and change our bodies, or needing to track, monitor, count and calculate anything. In the push to get young people to be more active, much of this messaging has gotten lost—we need to get back to encouraging young people to try things that feel good for their body, and that they enjoy. If they try something and don't like it, they can move on to something else—there are lots of things they can do!

**Instead of...**



**Talking about exercise to change physical appearance.**

"I've got to go to the gym to get my six pack back."

**Using movement as punishment.**

"I've been so lazy all week—I'm going to increase the incline on my treadmill and go extra hard today."

**Talking about the number of steps you are doing or calories you are burning during physical activity.**

"Oh wow, I'm burning so many calories right now!"

**Try...**



**Role modelling participation in physical activity because of the wide range of positive health benefits it provides, not because it changes our bodies.**

**We know from the research that people who are motivated by health as opposed to appearance reasons engage in physical activity for longer.**

"I'm going to start going to the gym again—I feel like I'm much less cranky when I'm moving my body regularly!"

**Emphasising that moving our bodies is fun and feels good—it's not a form of punishment. Avoid the details and stick to the fun and feel-good factor.**

"I feel amazing after that Pilates class!"

"I'm really looking forward to listening to music on the treadmill today, it's going to be fun!"

**Focusing on what we can do with our bodies, and enjoying how movement feels. It's not about energy in and energy out, or measuring, counting and achieving numbers—there is no magical number of steps we need to do each day!**

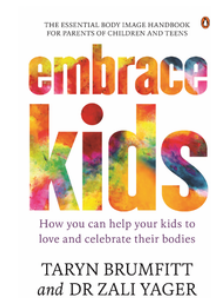
"I'm so proud of myself for finishing that hike today." or "You know what, I didn't think I'd be able to stick to that online yoga program, but I've just been doing a little bit each day and I'm really proud of myself for completing the 30-day challenge!"

# MORE FROM EMBRACE KIDS.



## **Embrace Kids film**

*Embrace Kids* is an uplifting film by Taryn Brumfitt that brings together a vibrant collection of stories from young people and famous friends alike, who share their experiences of body image, bullying, gender identity, advocacy, representation and more. [theembracehub.com/see-the-film/](https://theembracehub.com/see-the-film/)



## **Embrace Kids book**

*Embrace Kids* is the inspiring and practical book from Taryn Brumfitt and Dr Zali Yager. *Embrace Kids* is divided into two parts. The first section helps adults accept and appreciate their own bodies so they can role-model this to kids. Part two combines stories and science to cover all the major areas of concern for parents, like managing the food environment and the influence of social media, peer drama and bullying. [bodyimagemovement.com/shop/](https://bodyimagemovement.com/shop/)



## **Embrace magazine (coming soon!)**

In this wrestle-the-postie-worthy mag, you will feel a personal high-five, fist bump and warm hug all at once, while you take a ride through parenthood alongside a community of like-minded parents. It comes with no judgement or pressure to do more—just a vibrant collection of uplifting stories and practical, science-backed advice about embracing our own bodies and nurturing our children to do the same.



## **Parent Masterclass (coming soon!)**

Join comedian Nazeem Hussain for everything you need to know to start helping your kids build better body image—in less time than it takes to drink your coffee! In this rapid-fire round-up, he shares a range of practical and easy-to-implement tips from our experts that add up to big impact for young people of all ages.

Sign up to [bodyimageresources.com](https://bodyimageresources.com) to be the first to receive all of our tips, tricks and tools. And share the love—recommend that other parents, educators and sports coaches sign up too!

The Embrace Kids Australia Project has received funding from the Federal Government.