

Younger Teens Should Not Be Wearing Revealing Clothes

You might think that because I'm a sex therapist I'm fairly open-minded and not easily



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shocked. I would have agreed with you, but now I'm not so sure. I really need some help from you this time. Do you think I'm overreacting?

The other evening my husband and I decided to catch

a late movie. I put on my fleece vest, shawl and gloves, ready to brave the elements. It was about 27 degrees — not frightfully cold for this time of year — but with the wind chill, it felt like 10.

Anyway, as we waited in the ticket line, a group of teens milled around, socializing. My guess is that they were between the ages of 12 and 16. But as I looked at them, my jaw dropped. I know I've seen this before, but I guess the cold weather amplified the absurdity of their attire. I'm talking about skimpy tight T-shirts, teeny-tiny skirts no longer than a wide belt, and

things provocatively peeking from painted-on jeans. To put it bluntly, I felt as if I were attending a hookers' convention — there's just no nicer way to say it. The guys wore more clothing, but their underwear was in plain view.

As I stood there, bundled in my down jacket, I wondered if we were all going nuts. Who lets these kids out of the house dressed this way? Unless they have a stash of clothing in a duffel bag for a quick costume change, some parent is condoning this.

It's been a few years since my own kids were teens, but something seems to have gotten seriously out of hand.

Curious, I decided to see what other "experts" in the field of sexuality are saying about this subject, so I did a Google search and found the following Q&A posted online:

Question: *How important is it to monitor what my 14-year-old daughter wears? She is a very good student, doesn't give us much trouble, and is generally easy to get along with. She does look like she is 17 or 18 and some of the pants and short skirts she wears are revealing. Should we*

just let her make her own decisions or should we step in?

Answer: *At 14, what she wears brings her a sense of power in creating an identity for herself during this very intense, confusing, hormonally charged time of her life. I have seen my daughter move through the teen years and have experienced the conflicts you mention when it comes to form-fitting attire. My advice is not to express concern about her physical presentation of self unless you believe her appearance is deteriorating health-wise. Otherwise, take some pleasure in seeing your daughter as a teen leading a happy productive life, confident of who she is and how she looks.*

I read this answer umpteen times and I'm still floored. I can't disagree more. Of course all parents want their kids to lead a healthy productive life; that's the point of educating them about age-appropriate conduct. But this situation definitely warrants parental intervention.

Kids are always in a hurry to grow up. I'm sure you remember whining, "Every one else is doing it" and your folks' replying, "and if everyone else jumped off a

bridge ..."

Are we so worried about losing our buddy status with our child that we abdicate our responsibilities as the adult? Why are we so hesitant to step up to the plate on this issue?

Some parents tell me it's impossible to find appropriate clothing on the racks. Maybe if we stopped buying this stuff, there might be an incentive for companies to sell something else.

On the flip side, there are hordes of sensible parents who stand their ground. A mom of a 15-year-old recently told me, "I tell my kid if I see their underwear coming out of their clothing, it goes into the trash. It's called 'under' wear for a reason!"

Whatever the causes of this phenomenon, there's just no question that we're seeing more and more skin on young teens and pre-teens.

Sexually provocative dress stimulates responses that kids are just not ready to handle. We know that the need for attention and peer approval is enormous, but how far should a kid go to fit in?

We're getting much better

about discussing the dangers of alcohol and drugs, but the subject of sex is still taboo. It's impossible to talk about provocative dress without talking about sex — maybe that's why so many parents turn their heads, hoping this "stage" will soon pass.

Please understand that I'm not advocating we turn back the clock. Women have come a long way in terms of their hard-earned empowerment, pride and ownership of their bodies. But we need to help our kids understand that copycat nudity is a misguided attempt at maturity.

How grown men and women dress is their own business. There's a debate about the appropriateness of showing cleavage in the work place (fueled by films like "Charlie Wilson's War"). If you're an adult and you want to feature one of your favorite "assets," you've probably weighed the consequences. We're talking about kids here.

Schools are beginning to set more boundaries on dress, and some are even opting for uniforms. Arguments about individuality and conformity continue. But parents are the

primary educators. We can't expect schools to do it all.

So call me old-fashioned, but I think parents should put their collective feet down. Whatever happened to saying, "As long as you're living under our roof, you'll play by our rules?" I don't suggest getting heavy-handed — just getting more involved.

Teen dress offers a perfect opportunity for open, honest, caring dialogue about self-esteem and sexually responsible behavior. Establishing a positive feminine or masculine self concept is critical to health. So let's do it without risking pneumonia.

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