



Fashion Don'ts

Kids and moms don't always see eye to eye

By Kelli Wheeler

Have you ever wished you could put a little disclaimer on the back of your child's shirt? It would say something like: "I chose this ridiculous outfit, hairstyle and/or accessory to wear today. In trying to not undermine my self-esteem, my parents let me out in public like this. It should not be considered a reflection of their parenting abilities or lack thereof."

Just the other day at the park, my friends and I were lamenting our children's choice of self-expression at the sake of our respectable mommy images. One of my friends was cringing over her daughter's insistence on parting her hair, Alfalfa-style, with barrettes holding back her plastered-down bangs, something she did herself and thought looked absolutely stunning.

My other friend had thrown her hands up in surrender as her daughter came sashaying up in a lovely sundress that she had been wearing for a week straight, unwashed.

And there was my son, wearing his way cool Harley-Davidson tank top, which fit him perfectly—two summers ago.

To be honest, since we knew we were going to be among friends, we let our little fashion don'ts out of the house without a fight. (One girlfriend confided that she hasn't had to worry about her daughter going out of the house in her favorite horrible outfit—the one that made her look

like a boy—since it mysteriously disappeared one day.)

We are victims of our children's fashion faux pas. We all have agreed to be plastered across the Fashion Don't pages in exchange for our children feeling wonderfully independent and full of self-confidence.

**Just the other day
at the park, my
friends and I were
lamenting our
children's choice
of self-expression
at the sake of our
respectable
mommy images.**

However, we've had to lay a few ground rules. In one family I know, the rule is: When you're with *your* friends, you wear what you'd like. When you're with *my* friends, you wear what I like. In my own house, Mommy overrules any outfits, hairdos or accessories for any social occasion when the whole family is getting dressed up. This includes my husband. I think he might have the most vetoes out of everybody.

Sometimes, though, you just have to cringe and bear it. Like the time my mom picked up my sister from kindergarten after my brother had escorted her grudgingly to school.

Out pranced my sister from the classroom, obviously feeling fabulous in a ridiculously frilly dress cinched at the waist with a belt that made her look like a human sausage and my mom's pantyhose bagging down at her ankles. My mom was mortified as the teacher eyed her with disdain, but in the end all she could do was laugh at this adorable little girl who thought she had dressed herself as a princess.

There have been more than a few times when I have desperately wished Grrranimals would make a comeback. I'm sure my kids would buy into the fun of matching a giraffe top to a giraffe bottom or lion shirt to lion pants just like the old days. I wouldn't have to pull reverse psychology on them or make up fake rules, trying to trick them into a matching, presentable outfit. "Are you sure you want to wear those rainbow striped tights with sandals and a sundress? I don't think your school's dress code allows tights with more than one color in them."

Or "Oooh, cowboy boots with shorts and a tank top. Nice outfit. I

bet everybody at the park is going to wear that today, too. I have a feeling no one's wearing jeans with their boots, though."

Of course, it would be easier and less embarrassing to dictate every outfit our children wear, making them our little ambassadors of the perfect family image. But squashing their budding self-expression for the sake of outward appearances, a very adult neurosis, would be a shame and a missed opportunity in building self-esteem. Letting kids dress and groom themselves is an opportunity for them to create their own personal identity.

Seeing our children take their first tentative steps in establishing a self-identity should make us proud and be seen as the reward of a job well done in raising confident, independent and self-assured individuals.

And who am I to shoot down someone who wants to wear black Converse high-tops with flames with her sundress to school? I spent the '80s in neon pink and green from head to toe, with a matching visor.

I looked fabulous, I might add. ●