

Costume dramas

Dressing your independent child needn't be a daily battle of wills

HAVE you got a defiant pre-schooler who insists on wearing a tutu to the shops or shorts in the middle of winter?

Don't worry, you're not alone.

According to relationship educator Dr Vivienne Mountain, it is not uncommon for young children to kick up a fuss when it comes to getting dressed.

Dr Mountain, who runs parenting programs for relationship counselling service LifeWorks, believes it's all about independence.

"For toddlers and pre-schoolers there is great delight in being able to take off and put on their own clothes," Dr Mountain said.

"This is a developmental achievement, showing a growing sense of identity and control, but can be frustrating for parents."

Dr Mountain said fussing with clothes might indicate a child had a strong sense of self and desire to be in control.

"This can be genetic and will need some clever strategies regarding how to accept, and to some degree modify, this predisposition," she said.

"On the other hand, the behaviour can indicate anxiety and it might be wise to check out other meanings behind it."

Dr Mountain said children picked up on tension or distress at home and might need extra reassurance in challenging times.

"Children often feel overwhelmed and act out in order to find some sense of control," she said.

Need help? Go to lifeworks.com.au

TIPS FOR FUSSY DRESSERS

Source: LifeWorks

- Go shopping with your child to give them some sense of power and choice.
- Offer alternatives: "I have put two outfits on the bed, you choose."
- Recognise good behaviour. Have a reward sticker for times when your child dresses themselves in sensible clothes.
- Instead of having a big argument try modelling sensible behaviour: "I am putting on my big coat, it looks so cold. I will put your coat in my bag just in case."



MUM'S THE WORD



Mother of two Emily Webb on the real issues facing Melbourne mums

I'm in a flap about Christmas. Already, I have taken out five toy lay-bys in the past few months and cancelled three. I keep wondering whether I am spoiling my kids with presents. You see, every time they see an ad on television or spot a toy catalogue the requests for things increase.

Like a fool, I decided that I must get the latest request for my kids because it will make them really happy and excited. Then the kids move on to the next big "thing" and have forgotten about whatever it is they asked for in the first place. The *Toy Story* character toys are the big thing they want this year - Woody for the toddler, Jessie for the eldest and a Buzz Lightyear to share. (I had set aside another set of the toys in case it became apparent that they could not share but, after some discussion, my husband and I decided that was too extravagant and they would simply have to share.)

It's not so bad with the two-year-old who is content with a \$2 trinket from the op shop but the five-year-old (who starts school next year) is very interested in toy adverts. It presents a great opportunity for some media literacy education and I am (age appropriately) discussing advertising with her.

I explain that companies "really want mummies and daddies to buy things for their kids" and that ads show people how a toy or game works.

"They play so many ads, Mum," my daughter remarks to me every time *Scooby Doo*, *The Smurfs* or *Ben 10* is interrupted. Well, she's learning.

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