

Don't Rush Childhood

Avoid the Pitfalls of Childhood Sexualization

These days, kids are overexposed to music, fashion and media that teach them to view themselves in a sexualized way, well before they are developmentally ready.

From clothing, music and toys to commercials and advertisements, girls routinely receive the message that sexy is good, and that being treated as an object of desire should be their goal.

Boys are lured into valuing girls based on their appearance, and into offering positive attention to girls who wear revealing outfits.

In a groundbreaking book called *So Sexy, So Soon*, authors Diane E. Levine and Jean Kilbourne encourage parents and other caring adults to do more than avoid the issue by not purchasing age-inappropriate clothing or music, or by limiting TV time. They advise parents to help their children understand what's going on in the culture around them, and explain why their children shouldn't give in to the pressures to be sexualized.

Here are some of their tips:

- ☞ **Know what your children are viewing or listening to** and explain why you're setting limits. This helps them understand that you're not just saying no for the sake of being in charge.
- ☞ **Create rules before you go shopping** about what types of fashion are appropriate and acceptable, and again, explain why. Children do better when they know what is going to happen and when.
- ☞ **Reduce gender stereotypes** by helping your children (of both genders) develop a broad range of interests, skills and behaviors that don't focus on appearance.
- ☞ **Help your children develop confidence**, so they don't have to wear what "everybody else" is wearing or copy their music or television viewing choices. They shouldn't judge others' choices, but they shouldn't feel pressured to conform to them.
- ☞ **Establish safe channels of communication** so your children feel comfortable talking with you about what they see, hear and think without being embarrassed, ridiculed or punished. Children need a safe place to process what the sexualized environment exposes them to on a daily basis.
- ☞ **Be your children's biggest cheerleader!** Remind them often that they do not need to do anything special or become anything in particular to be valued and loved.