

WHAT REALLY DEFINES US?

(Characteristics vs Fashion)

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

How far have we come during the last 70 years in regards to the dictates of fashion? I wonder if we realize just how much we are influenced by clothing trends? The big sell, of course, is the idea that others judge who we are by what we are wearing. Yes, I know first impressions count, but first impressions are only skin-deep.

Even before the age of TV, the 'haves' stood out markedly from the 'have-nots' by the expression of their wealth – their stuff. They had the latest gadgets and wore the 'coolest' fashions. They could afford the real furs, the best cuts of meat, the best entertainment and the most luxurious living conditions, while poor folks worked many hours, in often appalling conditions, trying to make ends meet.

It has become engrained in us over the centuries that the definition of success stems from being good looking, being wealthy (including wearing the latest fashions), being an 'A' grade academic student in school or being in the top team in a particular sport. Guess what? That accounts for approximately 10% of the population. What about the rest of us?

Fashion trends are thrown at us from every side – through the media and in the stores. I have no idea who dreams up what 'the look' will be for the next season, but who of us dares to stand against this fashion dictatorship? We all seem to just get swept along with it.

What about kids and fashion? Where are the cute little baby hand-knitted jackets and dresses, fondly knitted by grandmother (me!)? They are nowhere to be seen. All babies these days seem to be dressed as baby teens or baby adults! Once kids get to 4-5 years of age and up they really start noticing what they and others are wearing. Kids' programs show them what they should be wearing, what their lunch boxes and back packs should look like, the best cereals and snacks they should eat and what toys would give them the most fun.

How do we, as parents, approach this avalanche of fashion and shopping trends? Should our kids be able to demand and get the latest and greatest of everything? Should we give in to our children's relentless requests for name-brand products? Are we powerless to say, 'NO' for fear of their ire or rejection? Where does it stop? Where should it stop?

The answer lies in the terms 'common sense' and 'strong values'. Our kids need to understand that what a person looks like on the outside does not necessarily make them cool, successful or happy on the inside. For that reason

our children need to be taught that integrity, honesty, loyalty, forgiveness, trust, respect, obedience and charity are the characteristics that really define us. These traits will see through the fickleness of fashion, and concentrate on what matters most – our hearts.

So, how do we deal with the everyday demands of 'coolness'? Common sense has to kick in. Kids shouldn't be able to make up an endless Christmas wish list and expect you to fill it. They need to be taught the value of money from an early age. It starts with explaining that you can only afford 'x' amount for each child's gifts, and let them decide from their list how much they can get with that money. They need to hear and understand the word, 'NO' sometimes.

When it comes to fashion trends, again you can tell your tweens and teens there is only so much you can spend on their clothing. Make up a list of 'must haves' and other important clothing. Let them make choices on how they spend their clothing money. If they run out, take them to Walmart or Goodwill to make their choices. Don't waiver under pressure.

You not only need to evaluate the cost of clothing and toys your kids want, but also evaluate the impact. In regards to clothing, kids need to be appropriately dressed for their age and stage. The impact of kids wearing inappropriate clothing can be devastating and they need that explained clearly. The impact of giving them what they want, when they want (indulgence) is that kids do not learn to value their stuff.

As kids grow older they need to learn to appreciate that 'stuff' doesn't make the man/woman. Strong character traits are life long identity builders. At any time 'stuff' can be taken away, but little can remove true happiness or joy when their mind is controlled by common sense and strong values rather than silly dictates of fashion.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.

CREATING GREAT STUDY HABITS

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

When my children were at school we had to constantly encourage one child to do homework while we rarely had to even mention it to the other. I have to admit that when I was at school, homework and study were not my favorite things to do either. There are a number of ways to encourage our kids to study effectively and to willingly do their homework. It all starts before they ever go to school.

Point one is to show them that learning is fun, exciting and it develops their imagination. As early as one to two years old we can encourage an appreciation for books by reading to them regularly. This should be not just at bedtime to help nod them off to sleep, but also during the day when they are alert. As you tell them stories, the pictures on the pages jump out and stimulate their imaginations. By comparison, when watching kids animated TV programs, the storyline, figures, colors, movement and sound are thrown at them without them having to use their imaginations at all.

Point two is to create a stimulating environment at home. This may include arts and craft materials, building blocks, play instruments, dress up clothes, boxes and old sheets and blankets. If you can find a space where they can leave things set up for a while it's even better. However, not everybody has this luxury.

Point three is that during the process of encouraging their imagination and learning, we spend precious time with them. Kids desperately want our attention and there is nothing better than for them to hear a parent saying, "Good one! Way to go! Look what you just created!"

Point four is that we are actively participating in their learning process. We observe their strengths, interests and needs and are able to respond appropriately to assist them to develop in a timely manner. As they become more dexterous we can extend their skills by giving them stuff to create on their own. Through experimentation they develop good perception skills such as how to balance and counter-balance structures, how to draw realistic shapes and how to mix color. With our encouragement they feel good about what they are creating and become increasingly more exploratory. Their own limitations begin to disappear as they discover and develop their knowledge and skills.

Point five is to ensure they have ample opportunity to apply what they learn at school. This requires us to create a daily routine that allows time and a quiet space for homework to be done as well as time to experiment just for fun. We would do well to keep up with our child's teacher to see if we can provide some enrichment opportunities and to reinforce what the teacher has taught that day.

Point six is to give your child some study tips so that they are able to turn their learning experiences into good grades in an assignment or test. The Internet has numerous sites where you can gain these tips. Just Google 'Study Tips' or 'Study Habits'. We will follow this story up with sets of habits and tips that we can summarize from experience and from research.

Point seven is to increase your child's ability to memorize. It seems today that in our education system we require very little memorization, but it still is an important part of being an educated person. Children can learn songs easily enough when they like the song, so they can still learn poems, spelling words and math tables. While many modern 'ivory tower' professors would say it isn't cool to do that any longer, they will return to it years ahead just as they have done with phonetics...because it works!

The goal is to give your child the greatest educational opportunities available so their futures will be bright and productive. Scripture tells us to study to show ourselves approved. Also, Solomon was very adamant that we acquire knowledge and wisdom. Out of this comes the ability to help others and to trust and fear God. What more could we want than to know our purpose and equip ourselves to fulfill this with all the potential God has endowed us with!

With a developed inquisitiveness in their pre-school years, children will readily soak up all the stimulating activities and learning opportunities they experience during their school years.