

THAT EARLY CHILDHOOD  
  
 What Do Tattoos, Piercings and  
 Hairstyles Have to Do with DAP in ECE?  
Heather Berni-Santty, MSW, MAE  
 APRIL 7, 2021

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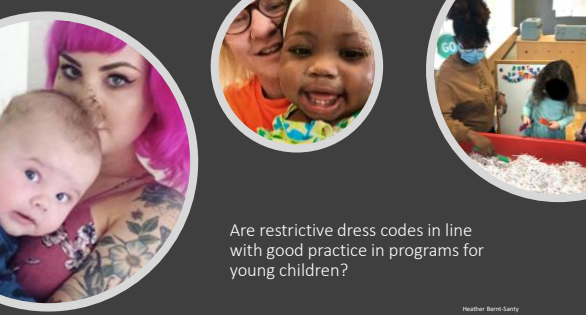
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Are restrictive dress codes in line  
 with good practice in programs for  
 young children?  
Heather Berni-Santty

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“When making decisions about  
 curriculum, environments, interactions  
 with children, and expectations for  
 children, it is vital that we are in  
 alignment with the core values of our  
 field.”  
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“It is important that we maintain our commitment to reflecting children’s lives and supporting their development in all aspects of our work—including our employee policies.”

Headline: Beverly Gentry, 2011-12  
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FIRST CONSIDERATION

What do we know about typical child development and what young children need in the early years?

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Social/Emotional Development:

- Autonomy vs Self Doubt
- Initiative vs Guilt

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Language Development:

- Storytelling
- Vocabulary
- Symbols and Real Things

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SECOND CONSIDERATION

What do we know about how the individual children in our care? How can we meet their individual needs?

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“A child whose parent (or other important adults) has tattoos, purple hair, or nontraditional piercings needs to see her family represented in her early childhood program. There are several ways that restrictive dress codes and biased attitudes about these forms of expression work against that child’s healthy identity development.”

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Examples:

- Hillary, who hears one of her teachers say to another that people with tattoos have likely been, or will be, in prison. Hillary's mom has a full sleeve arm tattoo and is a respected professor at the local university. She has never been in prison.
- Thomas, who writes on his arm with a marker in an effort to look like his tattooed dad, is scolded and told to wash it off because "tattoos are not nice."
- Rachel, whose mom is a goth with spiked purple hair, a septum piercing and several tattoos, is told to "come away from those people" when she moves to the playground fence to watch a group of high school students who look like her mom.

Ms. Allison Brown-Cook, PhD, EdS  
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THIRD CONSIDERATION

What do we know (or need to learn) about the social, cultural and home contexts the children are coming to us from?

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"The reality is that we will care for children whose families and communities look like the 'things' we are asking our staff to hide and be ashamed of. Our policies, which reflect our values, can help build relationships or can exclude people we see as 'other' or 'different.'"

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“As a field, we know that including men in our workforce benefits children and families from both a social and cultural perspective. We believe that the pros outweigh the cons presented by potential customer concern and trust in our ability to articulate our rationale. It is time to take the same risk, to see similar benefits, with the diversity that a tattooed or pierced workforce provides.”

Heather Bernt-Santy, PhD, MA  
April 7, 2021

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Heather Bernt-Santy

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