

# Artful dressing

Tattooes, very mini mini-skirts, and dyed hair – best-selling author and mother of three girls, **Karen Doherty** has seen it all before. Here she offers a few tips on how to get your daughter to take the ‘T’ out of tarty



**A** group of teenage girls are walking towards you along the pavement. They’re thick with make-up, waists revealed up to their chests, wearing sky-high heels and hoops the size of bull rings. They get just that bit closer and you realise one of them is your 13-year-old daughter!

It’s an age-old story from cringing parents. Slut Walks may be okay for political demonstrations, but not for our daughters. I recently saw my friend’s very buxom 15-year-old flouncing down the street in a way-too-tight mini-dress that didn’t do her curvaceous figure any favours. I still wonder how on earth she slipped out the door past her mum.

It’s probably just the type of confrontation you’d try to avoid. There’s always the quick fix of the crop-top going strangely missing in the wash; but what can we do in the long run to keep our girls looking respectable?

We want our daughters to listen when we say that another sartorial option may be more appropriate for their age, their figure or the occasion – without them taking offence or feeling picked on or rebellious. And there it is – the nugget – the underlying root of the issue: getting our girls to believe us and to take on board what we say.

First our girls need to feel that we’re on their side. But the odds are stacked against us. It’s their job at this age to begin making decisions for themselves, and in doing so they can start thinking it’s us against them. Here’s how to beat the odds, so our daughters feel we’re really there to help them:



## APPRECIATE

The way to start is to bite our tongues whenever possible and try not to be critical. Instead, we can take every opportunity to notice and appreciate the things our daughters do right. When we’re supportive and let them know that we think they’re wonderful, it’s very hard for them not to feel we’re on their side.



## LISTEN

By listening and acknowledging that we’ve heard what our daughters say, they’ll feel we understand them and are there for them.



Then there’s every chance they’ll listen to us and maybe even take our advice. Appreciating our girls and listening to them is also very good for their confidence. If we think what they say is important, they’ll think what they say is important.

And once they listen to us, we’re in a far better position to tell our daughters what we think. Here’s how:



## KNOW YOURSELF

It helps so much if we know what annoys us most. For me, it’s permanent things like piercings anywhere other than ears, including noses, bellybuttons, eyebrows and especially tongues. Thankfully, mine are still too young for tattoos! Your pet peeve may be something else, like short-shorts or super-minis that show her underwear.



## DISCIPLINE

When our daughters listen and we know where we stand, we’re in a position to say what we need to say. I told mine... ‘If you feel like changing yourself or making more of a statement, please don’t do anything permanent like piercing your nose, which can scar. You could always dye your hair or buy outrageous clothes, because you can always change them.’

**WHAT!?** Did this crazy parenting expert just suggest you tell your daughters it’s okay to dress like tramps?

It may sound like I’m contradicting the whole point of this article. But when our girls know we’re on their side, we can draw a line in the sand while still letting them feel they’re in control. Chances are they won’t even bother testing the boundaries because we’ve given them enough space, making them feel there’s almost nothing to rebel against.

So, even if they aren’t always dressed for success, when they’re going on their first babysitting job, internship or interview, they’re more likely to believe us when we suggest that another outfit may be more appropriate or flattering. Then we can smile, because we know that when it counts, we really are able to help them make good decisions.

*Karen Doherty is the co-author, with Georgia Coleridge, of *Seven Secrets of Successful Parenting* and is the mother of three girls, aged 12, 16 and 17. For more parenting tips and advice, take a look at Karen’s new website [www.karendoherty.com](http://www.karendoherty.com)*