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A 7-year-old doesn't need a push-up bikini top, right? So what do you say if she tells you she wants one?

Jen Weigel
Lessons for life
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Wearing a padded swimsuit can be a quick fix for those who want to increase the size of their bust. But is this really something to be worrying about at the age of 7 or 8? Abercrombie & Fitch thought so when they recently released a padded bikini top named the "push-up triangle" on their Abercrombie Kids website.

Due to the feedback, the company [announced on Facebook](#) that it has changed the product name to "lightly lined triangle" (see the story on the Tribune's [Breaking Business Blog](#)). Yet to many, the damage had been done.

"My first instinct was 'Are you kidding me? That's outrageous!'" says Leslie Modelski, a Chicago-area mother of three girls, ages 6, 9 and 12. "And whoever buys these is equally at fault. I mean, who puts their kid in that? My girls don't even wear bikinis. That's for teenagers."

"I won't be buying these for my daughters," says David Stewart, father of two daughters, ages 8 and 10. "This is all a publicity stunt. They did this a while back when they had thongs they were marketing for little kids. People talk about them, and sales spike for a little bit, but in the end, the smart parents know it's not something they will be buying for their kids."

"It is irresponsible to push fashion that promotes a particular asset that hasn't been physically developed yet," says food and relationship writer Rea Frey. "[Kids] are like sponges. Making a padded top for someone who does not yet have breasts makes the child feel like something is wrong with them, and this could feed into [childhood obesity](#) or an eating disorder."

Psychologist Jean Greaves, who has two daughters ages 12 and 15, says she noticed her kids were gravitating towards Abercrombie years ago, and couldn't stop the infatuation from intensifying.

"I learned early on I had to set boundaries with them about what we could take home, even when they said 'But Mom, everybody has it!'" Greaves said.

So how can we draw the line at age-inappropriate clothing and help our daughters with their self-esteem?

"Don't freak out about this in front of your kids," suggests Charlotte Reznick, author of the book "The Power of Your Child's Imagination: How to Transform [Stress](#) and Anxiety into Joy and Success" (Penguin, \$14.95). "If your daughter says she wants that padded bikini, stay calm so she can hear your message. If you get emotional, the child won't hear your words—they just hear the emotion in your voice."

"If you get into an argument about why it's wrong or bad, then you become the person who is pushed out of the conversation," adds Greaves. "A parent can help their daughter develop positive self-talk, which is the talk that plays in your head all day long. If you hear them say to their friends 'I need to be skinny' or 'I need to be sexy,' you can bring it to the surface with a dialogue. Lots of small conversations throughout the day, like in the car when you're heading to or from school, can be helpful."

"Make your point lovingly," says Reznick. "Say, 'That kind of bathing suit is nice, and it's for a much older person.' Or, 'You wouldn't drive a car if you were 7 or 8.' Point out the positive and be sure to tell them they can do that when they're older."

And don't forget to stress the point.

"It's critical to point out your family's values often," say Reznick. "Tell your kids you want them to enjoy where they are NOW. We know kids are impatient, but point out that it's important to enjoy where you are in each stage as it happens. There will be countless times when your kid brings up an issue that might be shocking. Use that moment to have a calm conversation."

Experts also say that focusing on a lifestyle of wellness can help alleviate some of the peer pressure surrounding how you look on the outside.

"Girls need to realize there's not one body shape that's more beautiful than the next," says Frey. "Does it mean you're pretty if you have a voluptuous top half in a bathing suit? Absolutely not."

"Girls need to think about being healthy—and that takes into account what goes into your body, not what you wear outside of it. Show a child how to read. How to balance a checkbook. How to do a push-up. How the word 'beautiful' is subjective. How to have self-confidence that has nothing to do with what you like in name-brand clothing."

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