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**Here’s What Science Says About How You Can ‘Dress for Success’**

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*Eric Barker*

**Different color clothing says different things about you**

What you’re wearing definitely affects whether people follow your lead or do what you say.

You’ve probably heard the phrases “Clothes make the man” and “Dress for success.” These are two sayings that actually have research to back them up.

Lefkowitz, Blake, and Mouton (1955) had an experimenter in a city cross the street against the traffic. **When he was dressed in a suit, three-and-a-half times as many people followed him as when he was wearing a work shirt and trousers.** Business suits are a form of authority clothing.

In a study by Bickman (1974), the experimenter stopped a person on the street, pointed to an accomplice 50 feet away, and said, “You see that guy over there by the meter? He’s overparked but doesn’t have any change. Give him a dime!” The experimenter would then leave. The “guy over there” was part of the experiment. **When the experimenter was wearing a uniform (for example, a guard uniform), most people complied with the instruction to give the other person money for the parking meter. When he was dressed in regular street clothes, compliance was less than 50 percent.**

Clothes really do make a difference. In fact:

* Different color clothing [says different things about you](http://www.bakadesuyo.com/what-does-the-color-of-your-clothing-tell-oth). Most interesting is that studies show red has some pretty unique effects. For the most part, [red seems to mean sex](http://www.bakadesuyo.com/do-red-clothes-mean-sex). It makes [men more attractive to women](http://www.bakadesuyo.com/what-color-should-men-wear-to-be-more-attract). It makes [women more attractive to men](http://www.bakadesuyo.com/what-color-should-a-woman-wear-on-a-date). It helps [hitchikers get picked up](http://www.bakadesuyo.com/is-there-a-color-that-helps-hitchhikers-get-p%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank). (More on the odd and interesting effects of red [here](http://www.bakadesuyo.com/does-the-color-red-have-magic-powers).)
* Dressing young can [make you healthier](http://www.bakadesuyo.com/does-looking-young-help-you-stay-young). Glasses make you look[smarter but less attractive](http://www.bakadesuyo.com/do-glasses-really-make-you-look-smarter-but-l). How a female celebrity dresses can tell you [how short her marriage will be](http://www.bakadesuyo.com/is-there-a-formula-that-can-predict-how-long).
* You like brand name clothes because they [make you seem high status and (hopefully) this will cause people to treat you better](http://www.bakadesuyo.com/why-do-we-like-brand-name-clothes-so-much).
* [Dark clothes = neurotic. Formal dress = conscientious. Messy and unconventional clothing = open to new things. Cleavage and expensive clothes = narcissism in women.](http://www.bakadesuyo.com/what-can-you-tell-about-someones-personality)
* You trust doctors more when [they wear the white coat](http://www.bakadesuyo.com/does-it-matter-what-a-doctor-wears). You like musicians’ music more when they [dress the way you expect them to](http://www.bakadesuyo.com/does-a-musicians-clothing-affect-how-much-we). By the same token, [what you wear affects how *you* act:](http://www.bakadesuyo.com/does-what-you-wear-affect-how-you-act)when research subjects wore lab coats they acted more attentive and careful. So choose your clothes wisely when you need to perform at your best.
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# Dress for Success

* **By Valerie Marchant**
* This fall, school districts all over the U.S. are introducing uniforms or tightening dress codes so as to rule out all manner of garb deemed provocative--tank tops, oversize pants, clunky shoes, body piercings, ghoulish makeup and, of course, trench coats. Since the Columbine High School tragedy, "school leaders have been grasping at any policy that could contribute to a more civil, safe and tolerant school environment," observes Jay Goldman, editor of the monthly magazine School Administrator. And clothing is the most tangible of targets.
* UNIFORMS ARE IN
So enthusiastic are American families about uniforms that this year they will spend $1.5 billion on them--triple what they spent just two years ago. By themselves, says Goldman, "school uniforms are not the answer to higher achievement or to closing the gap between minority and majority students." But a change in dress, particularly to a uniform, can have numerous positive effects. Students may become more self-confident and self-disciplined, less judgmental of other students, better able to resist peer pressure and concentrate on schoolwork. Jean Hartman of Long Beach, Calif., was once an opponent of uniforms. But after they were made mandatory in her children's school district--where 66,000 students in 56 elementary schools, 14 middle schools and one high school now wear them--there were "fewer disruptions, fewer suspensions, better attendance," according to Dick Van Der Laan, the system's spokesman. Criminal incidents at the district's schools have decreased 86% since uniforms were mandated in 1994. "A uniform," Hartman now says, "breaks down any kind of social and economic barrier kids may put into place at that age, so everyone is on an even playing field." Marylouise Ortega-Lau, principal of the Wilson Classical High School in that district, notes that "there is a more businesslike attitude as a result of wearing the uniform--and you need to show students how to deal in the world of work and business, where there are limits on dress."
* If your child's school is considering adopting a dress code or requiring uniforms, here's some advice from those with experience:
* GET INVOLVED
When parents inquire about the possibility of a change in dress code, the school board typically sends a survey to its families. If two-thirds of the parents surveyed respond positively, administrators, teachers, parents and students work together to come up with a code or uniform, along with incentives, compliance measures and means for providing free uniforms to needy families. A dress policy, says Van Der Laan, must be "parent driven." Only then is a new policy likely to succeed.
* BE INCLUSIVE
Students should be part of the decision-making process. "You need student representation in any decision about clothing," insists Goldman. "If you are trying to build buy-in, you can't expect students that are not represented to feel that they have any connection."
* WORK YOUR WAY UP
School administrators, including Renee Shackelford, principal of Flat Shoals Elementary, a year-round school in Georgia, have learned that if you are planning to introduce uniforms into the schools, it is easier to start with younger students. That's because, she explains, their "parents are still making a lot of the decisions."
* MAKE IT EASY
Choose a variety of garments, including jumpers, overalls, shorts and skorts, as well as skirts and pants, in classic, comfortable styles. Jayne White, an education professor at Missouri's Drury College, believes that young people cannot appear to be "walking robots--they need to keep some identity of their own." The clothes should be made by various companies and be available in many local stores in a wide price range. With the help of community groups and fund raisers, your school should be able to provide uniforms to families who cannot afford them and to keep some on hand at school for days when students turn up out of uniform.
* KNOW THE LAW
There are guidelines that a school should follow to protect itself legally. Find out what your state's laws are with regard to codes and uniforms. Make sure the policy is reasonably clear to all those involved, lest a federal court rule it "void for vagueness." Says Perry Zirkel, Iacocca Professor of Education at Lehigh University: "[If your policy is clear], and you have reasonable justification [such as gang violence] for the limitation, the court will be on your side." Make sure that the policy does not attack anyone's point of view and does provide ways for students to express differences, particularly religious ones. Zirkel advises that a school "avoid confrontation, keep the lines of communication open and not overreact to noncompliance."
* Imposition of a dress code or uniform should be one of several changes designed to improve standards in your school, along with those that promote more parental involvement and higher academic standards. Goldman believes that to introduce a new clothing policy "as part of a wider array of policies and practices is probably a very good thing." But he warns that "if done as a supposed quick fix, it is a terrible idea. Nothing is a quick fix in education."