

# Fabulous

OPINION

## Kate Wills

Our columnist on why *never* praising girls' appearance is too extreme

**T**he first words many people said to me when they met my daughter Blake were: "She's so beautiful!" Obviously I agreed. She was the best-looking baby I'd ever seen (I might have been a teensy bit biased), but the more people commented on how gorgeous she was, the more I started to feel uneasy. My friend Ella summed it up hilariously: "Yes she's beautiful, but she's also smart, kind and... a bloody good feminist."

It was a ridiculous thing to say about someone who, at that point, could do little more than gurgle, but that's the sentiment behind the current trend in parenting. A slew of child-rearing experts now advise never praising a girl's appearance because it places too much emphasis on looks and can lead to confidence issues. Recently, a video on Instagram from child psychologist Dr Becky Kennedy titled *Why I Don't Comment On My Kids' Appearance* generated much debate – and nearly 400,000 views.

The idea makes sense to me in principle. It drives me crazy that girls are told how pretty they look, while boys are praised for being strong, brave and clever. And yet, policing my comments about my daughter's appearance would be near impossible. Never talking about looks might even make a bigger issue of it than it needs to be. And if your own parents can't tell you that you look wonderful, who can?

**I**'m reminded of a Facebook meme that did the rounds a few years ago, which instructed parents never to tell their daughters to hug people as it sends the wrong message about consent. I remember rolling my eyes when I saw it. I'd like to think it's possible to teach my daughter about having autonomy over her own body while also encouraging her to give her grandparents a cuddle.

It's true that looks are just our genetic lottery and aren't exactly a "talent", but it's churlish to say they don't matter. We all judge by appearances, whether we admit it or not. Research has found that attractive people of both genders get paid more, get hired for better jobs and have more developed social skills. I take delight and

'I'm going to keep telling my daughter she's pretty'



pride in my daughter – and a big part of that is because of the way she looks.

So I reckon it's important to talk to kids about appearances rather than pretending they're not a factor. I intend to chat to Blake about how unrealistic and unrepresentative most images in the media are. And I'd never say anything remotely negative about how she looks. I remember a friend at school being told by her mother: "Well, you're not *conventionally* pretty, darling." Ouch. Likewise, anything to do with weight or eating habits is also off-limits as even off-hand remarks can lead to a lifetime of body hang-ups.

Perhaps the answer is to tell boys they're handsome as much as we tell girls they're pretty. To comment on how lovely boys' outfits are as much as we do little girls'. And to make sure that compliments about my daughter's looks are just one of many things I celebrate her for.

At the moment Blake is the *best* at trying to grab my phone, and also gives a good wave. When she's older, I hope I can praise her for being a kind friend, a loving sibling or a passionate student. But right now, one of her key attributes is looking damn adorable in a onesie. And I won't feel bad about telling her that. **F**

● Follow Kate on Instagram @katewillswrites.

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