

Schools: Focus on Care, Not Hair!

Kayla Clayton

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. Should schools have policies about how students wear their hair? If so, what should they be? If not, why not?
2. Were you ever shamed or isolated at school? If so, how did that affect you?

Schools today should not dictate how children wear their hair. Hair is one's identity and self-expression. Many schools believe they are preventing bullying by having uniform and hair policies.



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Student Punished for Shaving his Head



Stan Lock shaved his head to support people with cancer. His school excluded him from all activities until his hair grew back.

However, they are passing judgment on certain hairstyles, and that is not right. Schools should put their attention on more pressing issues – not hair!

Schools Acting Like Bullies?

In some ways, school officials are the bullies. They are judging people based on their look. A School in North Somerset, England, isolated Stan Lock, a 12 year old student, because he shaved his head. The school called this an “extreme haircut” and said that it “did not fit in with uniform policies.”¹ The student shaved his head to raise money for cancer research, but teachers still punished him. Isolation is a form of abuse, and it could damage a student's mental health.

From Britain to here in the U.S., the issue with hair remains. A charter school in Malden, MA, gave detention to two African American sisters, Mya and Deanna Cook. They were not allowed to play sports or attend prom for wearing braids. The school's policy states students cannot wear drastic or unnatural hair styles.² Taking away a child's activities and special moments that cannot be replaced doesn't help resolve the matter in any way.

Hair Is a Personal Glory!

Schools should not make children feel badly for their differences. This form of treatment distracts from learning. There are too many other important issues to be addressed such as bullies, inappropriate student-teacher relations, and lack of educational resources.

Hair is a personal glory, and people use it to express their style, culture, and religion. It gives an internal boost of confidence and freedom, which can help children's learning at school. The main focus of all schools should be children's well-being, not how their hair looks.

Kayla Clayton is a student at NKC Adult Education in Kansas City, MO. She is a devoted mom who is hungry to further her education, better herself, and make a difference in the world!

Sources: 1. BBC News, 30 Jan. 2015; 2. Reuters, May 12, 2017 and <www.newsweek.com/wearing-braids-sends-black-girls-detention-malden-charter-school-608303>

AFTER YOU READ:

1. Look again at question #1 in the "Before you read" section. Has your opinion changed? Why or why not?
2. Search on the Internet for more articles about Stan Lock and/or the Cook sisters. Share what you learn.
3. Watch a video about the Cook sisters. (Go to the ACLU page listed in the box on the right and scroll all the way down for the link.) Watch it a second time and take notes.
4. Write a letter to Mya and Deanna. Refer to their story. Quote their words from the video. (Watch it again to make sure you quote them accurately.) Brainstorm what you want to say to them. Share a first draft of your letter with others in the class. Using their feedback, write a second draft. Proofread your letter. Check for typos and grammatical errors. Make sure you are using quote marks correctly. If you want to send your letter, you may be able to do so via the ACLU website.

Students Punished for Wearing Extensions



Mya and Deanna Cook were punished by their school for wearing their hair in braids with extensions. In April 2017, school administrators told them that their hair violated the school's policy and ordered them to remove their extensions. When the Cook sisters refused to do so, the school gave them detention and threatened to suspend them. Also, the girls were not allowed to participate on their sports teams. And the school banned Mya from attending the prom. After the issue became public, many people stepped forward to support the Cook family. On May 21, 2017, the school's trustees lifted the no-extensions ban through the end of the school year and permitted Deanna and Mya to resume all extracurricular activities. Photo and (adapted) text from <aclum.org/uncategorized/aclu-massachusetts-challenges-malden-charter-schools-discriminatory-hair-policy/>.