

# Responsible Retailing: BRC Childrenswear Guidelines



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## FOREWORDS

I am pleased to offer my support to the British Retail Consortium and its members who worked on producing these Good Practice guidelines.



I am sure that the guidelines will help companies show their customers that lots of thought has been put into offering the kinds of products that they want to buy for the children in their lives. I hope that all the BRC members who operate in the children's market will adopt these guidelines for their business and that non-members will see the benefits of this kind of approach too.

These guidelines are an example of how businesses have listened to the concerns of their customers and found solutions that are sensible, appropriate and proportionate, and that they are more than capable of playing their part in building the family-friendly society we all want to see. I wish the BRC and its members every success in putting them into practice.

*Sarah Teather*

Minister of State for Children and Families

Responsible BRC members have long taken steps to ensure the products they offer meet their customers' expectations of quality, price, style and taste. As a result there is a strong body of knowledge within our membership on managing the inevitable reputational risks thrown up in a fast moving commercial environment. It's what makes them successful businesses – day in, day out, they meet and exceed their customers' wishes.



When it comes to children's ranges, retailers are parents themselves and don't ditch their ethics at the store door. Every childrenswear team has senior staff asking "Would I dress my child in this?" Naturally parents have different tastes and views, and even the best retailer will, just occasionally, find something slips through and doesn't meet their usual high standards. Parents are finding their role tougher and increasingly express concerns that they are pressurised by societal trends that hurry their children into premature adulthood.

As a response, and growing out of our work with the Government's review undertaken by Reg Bailey, we have brought together childrenswear experts from within our membership to develop this good practice guidance. Intended to highlight issues of concern and guide thinking, it doesn't proscribe or provide checklists. It will, no doubt, need to evolve as trends, attitudes and technology change. We are grateful to retailers, the Review team and parents' groups for their contributions.

We invite all childrenswear retailers to join us and sign up to deliver the best childrenswear in the world, offering a wide choice of practical, fun and appropriate clothing to suit everyone's budget.

*Stephen Robertson*

Director General  
British Retail Consortium

## INTRODUCTION

British Retail Consortium members recognise their responsibilities in providing age appropriate clothing designs and marketing these to parents in ways which do not sexualise or unduly gender stereotype children. Good retailing is all about providing the goods and services that customers want, when and where they want it and at the right price. It is a highly competitive market and each retailer takes great care in positioning their offer to meet the wishes of their customer base. As a result each brand develops a unique offer. But responsible retailers share a commitment to delivering this wide choice of product and price range in a way that preserves the innocence of our children.

This good practice guidance has been developed by BRC members who have further signalled their commitment by becoming signatories. It draws on established good practice in the companies concerned. The guidance is intended as a backdrop against which individual retailer's policies are developed and not a substitute for those policies which will inevitably also reflect brand concerns.

We invite other retailers to join us in demonstrating the sector's determination that UK childrenswear should be the best in the world in offering a wide choice of practical, fun and appropriate clothing for the Under 12s, to suit everyone's budget.



## APPROACH

For the purposes of this document childrenswear is taken to mean all clothing, footwear and accessories designed and marketed for the Under 12s. It does not include dressing up clothes or toys, nor does it cover teenage fashion or babywear (up to 18 months).

The guidance draws extensively on existing good practice in responsible retailers. In developing the guidance we also took account of parental and children's feedback to retailers, preliminary findings of the Government's review into the *Premature Commercialisation and Sexualisation of Children* conducted by Reg Bailey, Chief Executive of the Mothers' Union, the views of mumsnet members and the work being undertaken on body confidence by the Government Office on Equalities.

Some of the issues give rise to very clear recommendations while others come down to individual taste, circumstances (ie the intended use of a garment or shoe) or age and physical development of the child for whom the garment is intended. We have tried to make it clear where there is consensus that certain minimum standards or practices should apply and where different approaches are acceptable provided certain concerns are taken into account.

Ultimately it will be our customers who determine what is acceptable and who measure the extent to which retailers deliver this. Changing fashions, textiles and technologies as well as the interpretation society puts on 'a look' mean this guidance cannot be set in stone. We will review it on a regular basis and invite comment from all stakeholders, over and above that received on a daily basis by retailers from their customers.

You can send comments to [info@brc.org.uk](mailto:info@brc.org.uk)

## STYLING

Childrenswear needs to meet a wide range of uses, from play to school to party or beach clothing. The use will often determine the choices of styling, fabric/material, construction and even colour range. There may also be different concerns according to the age of the child for whom it is intended – for example, leggings may have few age-related design issues whereas dress necklines may vary to some degree between pre-school children and those just pre-teen.

In considering styling it is established good practice that there are internal company discussions which cover sizing, cut, design and fashion trend, including the colour, sheerness and pattern of fabrics, and their age appropriateness. Fabrics and cut should provide for modesty: for example, sheer fabrics without lining are not acceptable for childrenswear bodices or skirts (but may be, with care, on other parts of the garment). Colour, pattern and decoration should be chosen with care. Slogans and imagery (including licensed images and brandmarks) must be age appropriate and without undesirable associations or connotations (for example, sexually suggestive, demeaning, derogative or political material or phrasing that could be interpreted as such). Humorous slogans need to be tested against a broad range of views as they can cause unforeseen and unintended offence. Gender specific slogans also need careful consideration.

Skirt and short length, neck/shoulder line and underwear shape need careful consideration, taking account of the stretch properties of the fabric used and the intended age group. Collections should enable children to be confident about their developing bodies and enjoy play and physical activity while maintaining modesty.

For garments such as trousers and leggings a single design may be appropriate for all sizes up to 12 years. Some styles may need adjustment to ensure the fit is appropriate for the intended age, for example, younger and older versions of the same dress style may need a different neckline.

Where styling is based on adult fashion trends these should be interpreted in a way appropriate to the age range concerned. This may result in different choices of cut, fabric or embellishment. Party wear needs particularly careful interpretation.

Colour ranges should be appropriate to the age range and garment: for example, black should not be used for first bras or underwear but may be highly practical for trousers for nearly all ages, and required for school uniforms. In developing a childrenswear range, consideration should be given to providing a choice of colours, including gender neutral choices.

Underwear ranges require the utmost care in design. Simple decoration and a wide choice of colours and patterns are welcomed by customers but care should be exercised to differentiate these from adult lingerie. Knickers and pants must provide modesty: thongs are not appropriate for children. Vests and crop tops should also be designed for modesty with no need for structural support in these garments.

With the earlier physical development of children over the last couple of decades it is important to offer well designed and supportive first bras to young girls as their breasts develop. Under-wiring is not necessary or appropriate for the smallest cup sizes (eg 28AA) designed as a first bra. Seam-free designs are particularly suitable, while giving due regard to cup size and the amount of support needed. First bras should be constructed to provide comfort, modesty and support but not enhancement. As a guide, the breast shape and contour should not be altered significantly when wearing the bra. Many parents find moulded cups of concern and where these are used to provide structural support, such as for larger cup sizes, retailers may find it helpful to provide advice to this effect (see Sizing and Labelling section). In the main, these products will be in teen ranges, rather than for the Under 12s.

Likewise swimwear should provide for modesty, including when wet, and should be designed with children's needs specifically in mind.

In designing footwear for everyday use, the standard approach should be to provide a stable, supporting shoe with a heel pitch (angle of foot) of generally not more than 2.5cm (1”), particularly for younger children and smaller shoe sizes. Careful consideration should be given to the likely use (eg play, school) and hence support and stability needed. Party shoes intended for occasional and limited wear may adopt more sophisticated styling but should still provide adequate stability, avoid excessive heel heights and choice of decoration or embellishment should be ‘pretty’ rather than ‘adult’.

## SIZING AND LABELLING

For most children’s garments it is both customary and helpful to indicate likely age rather than to use chest, waist or leg measurements in indicating size. Clearly children of a given age vary significantly in height and weight and many retailers take this into account in determining size ranges, often offering up to ‘Age 14’ for larger 11 and 12 year olds, for example. Similar considerations apply at any Under 12 range break and it may be appropriate to offer an overlap in sizes for certain age-specific ranges.

Sizing of children’s underwear and swimwear has attracted a great deal of comment and criticism in the media. It is most appropriate to label knickers, pants, crop tops and, usually, swimwear by age for Under 12s. However, bras should be labelled by under bust and cup size. Seam free bras may be labelled by either method depending on how the product is positioned within the underwear range.

The use of novel materials and constructions in bras for young girls have given rise to confusion and criticism, including allegations of padding and enhancement. It could be helpful to provide descriptions on labels of first bras such as ‘for support and modesty’. No mention should be made of ‘enhancement’ or ‘under-wiring’ in any children’s ranges.

## MARKETING

Responsible retailers target childrenswear marketing on parents and adult family friends and relatives, never directly to children. This applies to both traditional and new media. It is perfectly appropriate to use child models in marketing material provided the following guidelines are used.

Photography should feature children in natural poses in a childlike environment, appropriate to the age range concerned. Where make up is used it should be as natural as possible, ensuring the child’s natural charm comes through in the finished photograph. This does not preclude the use of face paints in a play setting, for example. The staging of photographs, like the design of clothing, should encourage children to develop confidence in their bodies without pre-conceptions of ‘more desirable’ body shapes, while supporting the public health agenda regarding child obesity.

Underwear should never be modelled on children in marketing material, including on packaging and point of sale material. It is vitally important that website images of children’s underwear do not involve child models.

It is recognised that store floorspace varies in size and configuration and that retailers cannot be prescriptive on the juxtaposition of childrenswear and other departments. However, any ‘adult only’ merchandise should be kept remote from the childrenswear department. When displaying childrenswear in-store children’s underwear should be kept within the childrenswear section. Decisions are more complex for bras and underwear for girls approaching teen years. Product ranges may not necessarily fit into either the children’s section or the adult lingerie department. The availability of professional measuring and fitting services in women’s lingerie may be a consideration. Careful consideration and internal discussions will be needed to ensure the best approach in general and for a given store.

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Online sites and new media marketing should observe the same photography and imaging guidelines, considering carefully potential misuse by others. Particular attention is needed in ensuring internet pathways are clear and appropriate for children who may participate in online shopping with their parents. Retailers should work towards website search facilities that provide the same separation of products as is delivered in-store.

## POLICIES

Responsible childrenswear retailers have clear policies that are well understood and embraced by staff, from buyers and designers through to those displaying and selling the goods in store. The method of dissemination is for decision by the individual retailer (ie the combination of oral and written guidance, training, embedded brand culture) but every responsible retailer will have clear internal accountabilities with an individual director acting as ultimate guardian of childrenswear standards, responsible to the Board.



## CUSTOMER CONCERNS

Successful retailers seek and act on feedback from customers, whether through in-store comment, correspondence and website comments, focus groups or insight studies. Responsible retailers give clear signposts on how to raise issues (positive and negative) and respond to those comments. Senior management consider and act on matters of particular concern raised by customers, including parents, and have systems in place to ensure such feedback reaches the responsible executive, such as childrenswear, commercial and marketing directors.

## PRODUCT WITHDRAWALS

In the very rare event that a design makes it all the way to production and retailing without adequate measures being taken to ensure that it meets the modesty, age appropriateness or gender/body confidence issues of concern to society, responsible retailers will use feedback from colleagues and customers to re-assess appropriateness. Where the retailer decides that it has not met its usual high standards in this regard it will act swiftly to withdraw the product from all stores and will not re-market it in other territories.

## SIGNATORIES

This good practice guidance has been developed by responsible childrenswear retailers in BRC membership, drawing on existing industry practice. The under-signed retailers commit to applying these guidelines in designing, commissioning and marketing their Under 12 childrenswear ranges:



George.

YOUR M&S



DEBENHAMS

John Lewis



Sainsbury's





**BRITISH RETAIL CONSORTIUM**  
for successful and responsible retailing



[www.brc.org.uk](http://www.brc.org.uk)

The British Retail Consortium is the lead trade association for the UK retail sector and the authoritative voice to policy makers and the media.

We represent retailing in all its forms in every UK nation, from small independents to large multiples and department stores, selling a wide selection of products through high street, out of town, community, rural and virtual stores.

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