

Article By **Charles Silberman** with contributions by Erik Geslak and Kennedra Tucker. Email Charles at charles.silberman@pgcps.org to ask additional questions. Published on PE Central: 8-27-10.

Question: What Is Considered Appropriate Dress For Male And Female Physical Education Teachers? – *Curious*

Answer:

Dear Curious,

This is a great question! As teachers, we have so many things to consider that we sometimes forget to pay attention to the most simplistic and powerful issues that are literally right under our noses. How we dress is a critical concern because it says a lot about who we are, and it affects our students' and colleagues' perceptions of us. Because people generally make lasting judgments within the first few seconds of meeting us, especially based on our dress, it is very important that our clothing is professionally appropriate.

Before I explain specific elements of how to dress, I want to explain the underlying importance of professional attire. Research shows that 70-80% of communication is non-verbal. That means that what we do often matters more than what we say, and our wardrobe is an extension of ourselves; clothes serve as a second skin. Clothes can help us communicate our emotions, state of mind, or thoughts. This means that our students and peers will draw meaning from our clothing, including assumptions of who we are, our inner thoughts and attitudes about them, and even our own perceived self efficacy. These perceptions will ultimately affect how our youth and co-workers interact with us. This can translate all the way down to how students behave while in our care and how they talk to us. Therefore, how we dress holds significance.

In addition to the significance dress holds as it relates to our inner state of being and subsequent interaction with others, it also sets a standard for our students to model. As teachers, one of our roles is that of a role model. Learners look up to us and want to emulate us. Therefore, we need to consider carefully, that as role models, it is up to us to show students the importance professional and appropriate attire has in life and the workplace.

I remember my Middle School physical education teacher. He had a mustache, wore body hugging shorts that seemed to ride up to his chest, and socks that reached up to his knees with those two colored stripes around the top. You know the ones I am talking about that your grandparents wore. Also, he wore a whistle around his neck and a white polo shirt that seemed to be tucked in too tight. I don't remember much of what I learned in Middle School P.E. class. But, his dress left an impression on all of my classmates, which is always a topic of conversation whenever I mention I that I teach P.E. and we reminisce about childhood memories of P.E. class. We are all professionals, and the way we dress carries great weight, as well as a lasting impression, so let's dress like professionals.

Looking at the appropriate dress through the lenses of its importance as a non-verbal communication tool that can affect our teaching and as a function of teachers as the role model, below are some specific guidelines for how a physical educator should dress. I have also included some pictures as a reference point. Keep in mind that these are general and your employer may have his or her own set of do's and don'ts.

Head	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well kept hair • Hair not excessively long (circa collar length for men and shoulder length for women) • Clean shaven face • Groomed facial hair • Moderate make-up that is natural in appearance • Moderate jewelry and accessories (sunglasses, hair bands, earrings, etc.) that are complimentary to the attire
Upper Body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collared shirt with clean and plain undershirt underneath • Shirt tucked in • Clean and neat outerwear (fleeces, jackets, gloves, hats, etc.) • No see through material • Keep midriff area covered without underwear showing
Lower Body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shorts should not go higher than the knees (Try the fingertip test. The fingertip test requires that the length of clothing be at or below fingertips when arms are placed at one's sides.) • Pants and shorts at or closely around waist level • No cut off or torn bottom shorts • Clean, closed toed shoes complimentary to the attire
Overall Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No inappropriate logos, patches, or sayings on clothing (beer logos, dirty sayings, etc.) • No clothes with visible stains or holes in them • Be careful about wearing body piercings (nose, lip, etc.) and visible tattoos (can send the wrong message to students) • Clothing does not hug your body like skin nor hang from your body in a baggy fashion • Dress up for special occasion (graduations, honor roll assembly, parent visits days, etc.) • Mix up outfits (Students see us 182 days a year, so make sure they are not looking at the same outfit every day.)



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