

# Children and nudity

## A British Naturism Briefing Note - Malcolm Boura – Revised April 2008

Many people just assume that there is some sort of conflict between the well being of children and nudity. The objective evidence shows that there is no basis for that supposition. Indeed there is strong evidence that the converse is true. The polling evidence shows that the attitudes of parents with respect to nudity are little different from the population as a whole.

### Introduction

There are a lot of misconceptions about nudity, especially concerning public opinion, the reaction of children and its effect on children.

Nine people out of ten think that naturism is harmless and two out of three think that back garden nudity should continue to be legal. Only in a restricted range of circumstances do children make any difference to peoples attitudes and then the difference is small.<sup>1</sup>

Nudity does not do harm to children but there is considerable evidence that prudery does. For example in Denmark nudity is legal nearly everywhere. In the USA nudity is a serious criminal offence nearly everywhere but American teenagers are nine times more likely to become pregnant. All of the research that we are aware of shows a similar pattern.

### Other peoples nudity

There are still several cultures where complete nudity is the norm. For example the Dinka put on clothes when they wish to be sexually provocative. Even in the UK where there are only a few million naturists there are several hundred thousand children living in naturist households. There are also children living in the residential naturist clubs and large numbers who spend their weekends and holidays in a nude environment.

Small children are completely oblivious to nudity.<sup>2</sup> Primary age children largely take their reaction from the adults around them and non-naturist teenagers are usually amused or a bit embarrassed. Children brought up in a naturist environment think nothing of it and children visiting a naturist beach, club or swimming session for the first time only take a few minutes to adjust. It really is astonishingly quick.

Many families, including large numbers that would not consider themselves to be naturists, are commonly nude around the house and in the garden. They make no big deal about it and, where they know about it, the children's friends commonly don't either.

Nudity is relatively unusual but it is not a hazard and children do not naturally consider it unsafe. If they are alarmed then it is because of other factors or because they have been told to be. Indeed an encounter with innocent nudity can be made traumatic if adults react inappropriately.

*"Mummy - why is that person not wearing clothes?"*

1 See Statistics briefing note

2 Mum and child driving down the road following a convertible when the woman passenger stands up completely starkers. "Mummy, mummy, that woman is not wearing a seat belt!" Probably apocryphal.

*"Oh you poor thing. You must have been traumatised. Let me offer you counselling."*

Nudity can be an aggravating factor for threatening behaviour but it is not inherently threatening. A flasher and a naturist are very different and that is reflected in the way that children react.

The reaction of children to nudity in art, advertising and similar is likewise very restrained. Indeed they are often completely oblivious to it. The author observed a family discussing a life size sculpture of classical Greek wrestling. The children were very concerned about the fighting but the lack of clothing was not mentioned. By all accounts that is quite usual.

### Their own nudity

Young children are completely oblivious to their own nudity. Consider the archetypal nude toddler in the supermarket with a trail of discarded clothing behind them.

As they get older they are taught that clothing must be worn but until about age 10 or 11 it doesn't really take hold. They will quite happily go naked when the circumstances are appropriate.

As children enter their teens they become more body conscious and unless they have prior experience of naturism they are usually nervous about participating.

Many naturist children become more reticent as they enter their teens but then teenagers are notorious for not wanting to do the things that their parents do. They do usually continue to participate, at least for activities such as swimming, and many return to naturism when they become more mature.

### Child protection

There is no evidence that children are any more at risk at naturists events than at equivalent textile events.<sup>3</sup> Indeed in some ways they are safer. Please contact the office for further information on child protection.

3 Chairman Cambs Area Child Protection Committee with respect to swimming pools.