

Dear Jill

I want my six-year-old to be a model...

Dear Jill,

I want to get my six-year-old daughter into modeling. What's your advice?

—Catwalk Mom, Chicago, IL

Dear Catwalk Mom,

Does your child want to model? I know that when I was six, my idea of a "model" was a truck or an airplane my brother built from a kit. Of course these days kids are submerged in the supermodel hysteria and when asked what they want to be when they grow up, responses like "Gisele" and "Heidi" are more common than "a doctor" or "a lawyer." So, your daughter may be begging you to send her down the slippery supermodel career path. If not, you shouldn't force her. If so, many factors—both physical and psychological—still deserve serious consideration.

Is your daughter of model caliber? Don't answer this yourself (I'm sure you've heard the phrase "a face only a mother could love," right?). And leave your daughter out of this superficial, highly critical process. Just quietly send in some natural snapshots—face and full-length—to some reputable agencies in your area (see "Keeping It Real" in the Holiday Issue for snapshot suggestions [disregard the bikini pointers—agents aren't so choosy about kiddy curves] and find legitimate agencies in 1st Option, Tear Sheet's agency directory which can be ordered on www.tearsheet.com).

If you get a negative response, drop it—at least for a couple of years. If you get a positive response, explain what it's all about to your daughter and make sure your endeavors building a portfolio

and going on castings is kept on the level of a fun hobby, not the life-or-death pursuit of all your own unfulfilled dreams projected onto your mini diva who would rather be playing house than posing under hot lights.

The first real test will be booking #1, when your daughter will reveal if she has all the essential qualities which separate the child models from the pretty but unposable boys and girls: patience, independence, animated expressions, and the ability to improvise and pose naturally with perfect strangers.

Just keep in mind the potentially worst aspect of a child model: the parents! I've seen one too many pushy, competitive, and ugly (inside and out) parents instilling shallow values into their tyrannical tots. I once worked with a beautiful five-year-old girl whose 5'5" troll of a father had her future all mapped out for her. I asked him if she were building a nice college fund (perhaps one justifiable reason to expose a youngster to all this vainglorious nonsense). He replied, "Oh, she probably won't even need college."

He obviously was overlooking the fact that his daughter—like most child models—was short for her age (this allows a more mature child to model fashions meant for a younger age group). Once many child models start to grow up (but not very up), they will find themselves pitted against their bean-sprouting teenage peers who reach 5'10" and grab all the bookings.

Does your daughter have any younger siblings? See "The Baby Biz" story on page 66; infants rarely suffer any psychological repercussions from modeling...as long as their careers end by age four.

—Jill

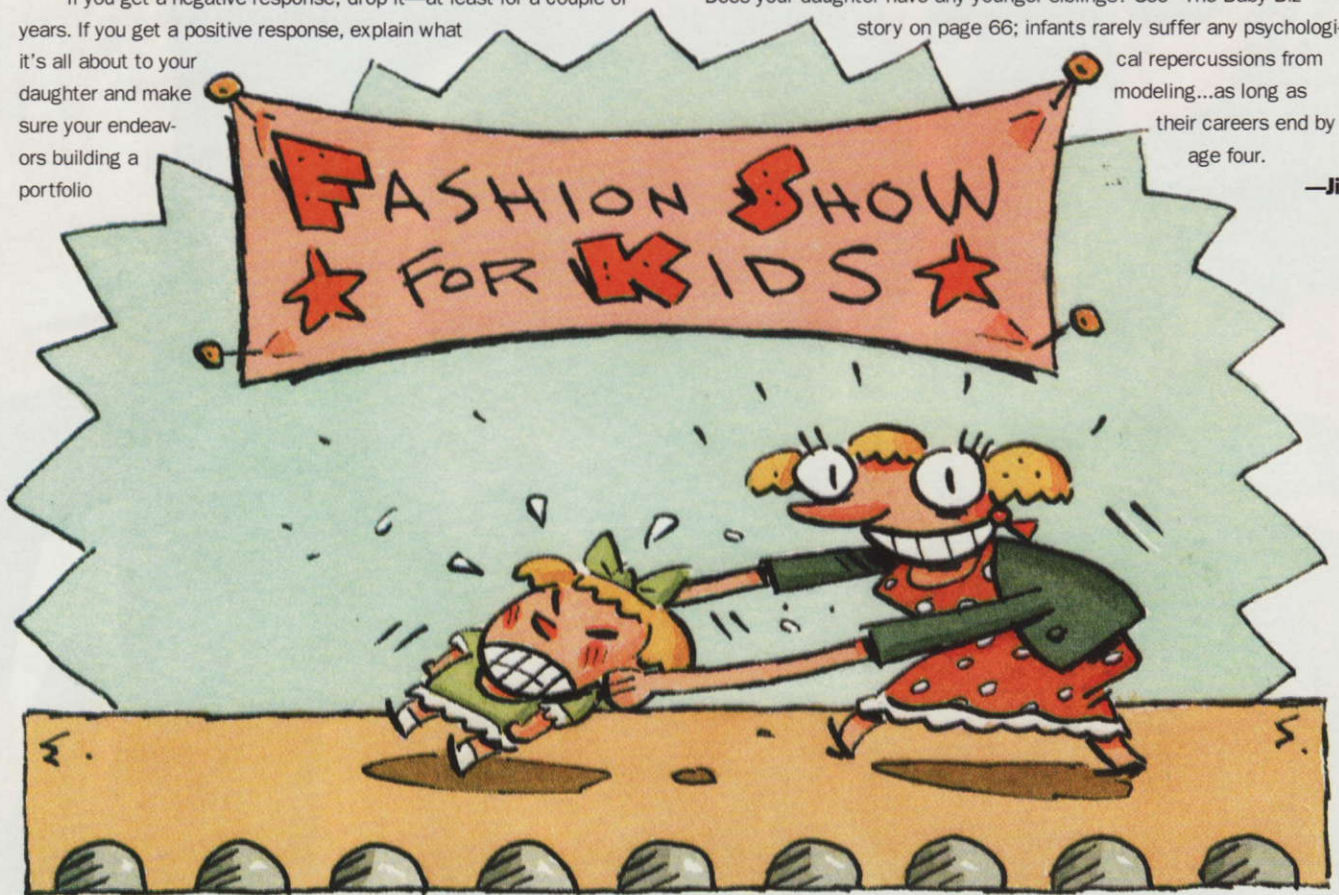


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