



The battle between parents and teens often comes down to what is worn at the bus stop in freezing temps.



## Reflections of a River Rat:

It's cool to be cold at the bus stop  
no matter what (brrrrr) parents say

We all have those audio clips from our parents looping in our heads.

Said every Mom ever: "Clean your plate – there are starving kids all over the world."

Said my mother, the A. Barton Hepburn Hospital nurse: "Don't ever show up at the hospital with dirty underwear on."

Said my father, often after a hectic day at school: "Quiet down – you're screaming like a bunch of banshees (Irish term for wailing spirits in a graveyard)."

My parents are gone, but I could imagine the commentary if they spied today's middle school boys wearing shorts at the bus stop in freezing temperatures.

"You're going to catch your death from pneumonia" would be followed by a comment about their common sense.

It's a common sight from Lisbon to Heuvelton to Ogdensburg to Morristown to Hammond. A few middle-schoolers wait for the bus while one boy, perhaps two, stands there in shorts or a T-shirt. I attribute it to styling for peers, but no teen-age know-it-all would openly admit this. I would not have.

Damie Bailey Evans said she has seen the Arctic-defying behavior regularly in her 20-year career as a teaching assistant at Morristown Central School.

"Every year you have the occasional student(s) who wear shorts almost every day, even in the winter when the temps are in the negatives," she said. "All of the students wearing shorts in the winter are male. Not sure if that matters, but I can't remember any girls wearing shorts, not that miniskirts would be any warmer."



**Sandy Bailey**

Her sister-in-law, Sandy Bailey, has seen a similar phenomenon during her time as a teaching assistant across the Ogdensburg district, including a stepson who "wore shorts every day regardless of the temperatures."

Some students benefit from hovering parents.

"Most children these days have parents that warm the car up in the mornings with a push of a button on their key fob," Bailey said. "The child runs out of the house (often with a hoodie and no coat), gets into a warm car. The parent/grandparent either drives them to the end of the driveway to wait for the bus or to school. They then get out of the car and run into a heated school."

Evans said her 2022 MCS graduate, Jack, followed a similar method while he had door-to-door transportation until he started driving. Without a warm car, he resorted to sweatpants over his shorts.

Hooray for sanity, but I dwell on the middle-school boy in T-shirt and shorts who seems to be training for a polar plunge. Evans does too.

"I was never sure why in the freezing cold these kids wore shorts let alone why their parents let them get out the front door with them on," she said.

She described herself as the mom "who has to ask." She gets these responses:

"Shorts are more comfortable than pants."

"My legs aren't cold."

"I get hot during the school day and these keep me cool."

Often, they simply brushed off Bailey's query.

"I would occasionally pipe up and ask them, 'What's going to happen if the bus breaks down?' Again, I am met with a laugh or a shrug of the shoulders."



**Damie Evans**

"Even when we have had minus 30 to minus 40-degree wind chills, you would have boys come off the bus in shorts. I have to say, there has been an occasion of a bus having mechanical issues or going in the ditch in the past. Luckily, no one was hurt or suffered frostbite."

Girls aren't immune from this behavior. My basketball buddy Jim Nunn recalled how his daughter, the high school swimmer, would walk outside after practice in her swimsuit, towel and slides, with a mop of wet hair, and hop in the car.

"You can question her sense, but she turned out to be a chemical engineer," he laughed.

While parents scratch their heads, science does fall on the students' side.

From infancy, children have a higher percentage of brown fat, which helps to regulate body temperature. When temperatures drop, the body begins to burn brown fat before you begin to shiver in a process called thermogenesis. Your percentage of brown fat drops as you age.

That Guinness Stout tumor around your midriff contains white fat; the brown fat gathers around the back of your neck and shoulders, with bits dispersed throughout your muscles. People who spend a lot of time outdoors in cold weather tend to have more brown fat.

Could it be that middle-school boys know more than we realize?

One mom, dispensing online parenting advice, lamented: "Nothing like a pants fight at 6:30 a.m. to get the heart rate going." Much of the struggle is the battle for independence as pre-teens age.

Michael Bradley, a psychologist and parenting expert based in Pittsburgh, suggests picking your battles. Wearing shorts, he said, pales in comparison to bigger issues like drugs, sex and violence.

"Those are the things that you go to war for," said Bradley, whose had just watched his 16-year-old daughter head to school in a short-sleeved T-shirt. "Short of that, almost everything else is not really life-threatening. You just counsel one time and when the kid says you're crazy, you get out of their way and let their kneecaps freeze off."



We all have our own parents' advice on autoplay in our heads. We were smart enough to walk the half-mile home from basketball practice in pants through a frigid North County evening, but not bright enough to wear a hat. Our hair froze.

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