

Attention Subscribers: Print + iPad + Digital Edition

MACLEANS  CAGO BEHIND THE SCENES AT  
**TIFF 2011**  
ENTERSubscribe  
**now** [Subscribe](#)[Student offers](#)Categories: [Fashion](#)

# Stiletto in the schoolyard

Fabulous moms get a frosty reception on the first day of school

by Cynthia Reynolds on Friday, September 9, 2011 10:15am - [0 Comments](#)

Photograph by Chris Bolin

The British call it the Elle Effect, after '80s supermodel-turned-celebrity-mom Elle Macpherson. All year the press has obsessed over the fabulous clothes the 47-year-old wears to drop her boys at school—shag jackets, meticulously ripped jeans, even skin-tight, red-leather pants. Now, as images of trendsetting matriarchs such as Victoria Beckham and Claudia Schiffer toting tots to class flash around the world, women are trading in their mom jeans for more fashionable apparel.

While first-day fashion dilemmas are usually limited to the kids, a lot of moms put extra effort into how they look—after all, first impressions are important, especially when meeting the teacher. There are far more choices as fashion becomes increasingly accessible at stores such as Zara, H&M and Joe Fresh. But as classes resume across the country, it's the fashionistas who get noticed, and not always in a good way.

Arlene Worsley wears stilettos in the boardroom, so the 30-year-old Calgary mom figured the same would do for school. When she stepped into the schoolyard in a pair of yellow heels on her son Anthony's first day of kindergarten last year, the senior communications adviser immediately felt shunned by the other moms. "They didn't want to talk to me at all. I quickly learned that what I wore made a difference," says Worsley, whose style muse is Jennifer Lopez. "So I went to Old Navy and bought khaki cargo pants, a hoodie and some flip-flops." For a couple of weeks she led a double life, dressing down for drop-off and changing at work, but no matter what she wore, it didn't seem to counteract that first impression. Eventually she gave up. "The schoolyard is definitely a battleground," she declares.

In Laval, Que., Anh Mai, 35, would overhear women commenting on her clothes. "I don't have time to look like that," they would say. So Mai, who describes her style as casual chic with edge, decided to wear flats instead of heels on her son Dylan's first day of kindergarten this year. "I just didn't want people staring at me because of my shoes." Wearing flats, however, is as far as she'll go. "I don't like fashion—I love it. And I think if you give up what you love, then you're incomplete."

The main thing is to make a good impression on the teacher, so they don't ignore your child, or worse yet, dislike them. And U.S. psychologist Barbara Greenberg, who studies the dynamics between parents, students and teachers, is convinced that how the teacher feels about the parent affects the student-teacher relationship. She thinks too-hip clothing can be a problem. "It's like perfume. When someone wears a lot of it, it can feel like an assault." A Toronto teacher, who wants to remain anonymous to avoid hurt feelings, says, "You try not to judge. Still you can't help wonder if they care more for their looks than their child."

At Worsley's first parent-teacher interview, she was wearing casual clothes and felt the teacher was warm toward her. But the next time she was wearing business dress and the dynamic changed. "There was less eye contact and she was more guarded."

Fashion consultant Erin Nadler of Better Styled in Toronto has noticed an increase in moms coming to her for a new look. They've witnessed their peers ditching the Lululemons for more chic pieces, but they need her help to create a more polished look. "They want to know how to wear tunics, how to accessorize with funky scarves and belts and the best jeans for their bodies," Nadler says. "They're not interested in the classic black pant anymore."

So where does it leave moms now? A trendy tunic with leggings and flats but no heels? Yes to wide leather belts, but no to faux-fur scarves? Worsley giggles about the sad reality of the schoolyard fashion wars. "Hopefully, we can all play nice in the sandbox."

Each issue of Macleans for only 91 cents. [Subscribe now.](#)

**Tags:** [Elle Effect](#), [Elle Macpherson](#), [fashion](#), [H&M](#), [Joe Fresh](#), [mothers](#), [Old Navy](#), [school](#), [society](#), [Zara](#)



Recommend

Send

21 people recommend this.

0

 [Print](#)

 **SHARE**    

**More by macleans.ca**

.