

# What Should I Do About a Coworker Who Dresses Inappropriately at Work?

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Commenting on someone's appearance is fraught. Here's how to know if you should say something.

Q: What should I do about a coworker who dresses inappropriately at work?

A: My first instinct is to advise you to keep it to yourself. Commenting on someone's appearance is fraught and how someone dresses or styles their hair, etc. very often falls into the category of none of your business.

But, there are nuances and circumstances where something is actually inappropriate. Before you say anything, run through these checks:

- Does your workplace have an official dress code policy?

Not all workplaces do, and many are unhelpfully vague. (After all, who actually knows what "business casual" means?) If there is a policy and it states a guideline that your coworker is very clearly violating, you can bring the issue to the person's manager or HR to handle.

- Consider what is truly 'inappropriate'

Just because you think sweatpants are unprofessional doesn't mean you need to police other's clothing choices. Issues with appearance usually only rise to the level of intervention in a few scenarios.

For example, if someone is in a client- or customer-facing role and there is an expectation to dress formally when meeting a client, or to dress in a way that respects the culture in the place you are doing business. Or if there is a need to dress safely for workplace hazards (like closed-toe shoes on a construction site, for example).

Among internal colleagues, the only reason to intervene is if their appearance is causing a legitimate issue in a workplace. Clothing with political messages or graphic images likely falls in the same bucket as displaying similar content at your desk—if it's not allowed there, it's not allowed on your body.

As for "inappropriate" in the context of "too revealing," tread very lightly and ask yourself if it's more of a "you" problem than a "them" problem. There's a long sexist history of rules around women's appearance at work—from requiring things like high heels and skirts to punishing women for dressing in a way that "distracts" men. If you truly think that someone's appearance is holding them back from getting a promotion or being taken seriously, you can have a conversation with them where you don't blame or shame them.