

Kids Under the Knife: Can Cosmetic Surgery Stop Bullying and Should it?

By [Sarah B. Weir](#), Shine Senior Writer | [Beauty](#) – 18 hours ago



A young patient before and after otoplasty (courtesy Dr. Joe Niamtu, with permission from the girl's parents)

Stephanie Smith, the mother of a six-year-old, wrote to [cosmetic surgeon Dr. Joe Niamtu](#) in a panic. Her daughter Olivia had quit ballet because when she wore her hair in the mandatory bun, the other kids laughed at her, pointing to her ears. "Last night she came to me crying asking me, 'Why are my ears like this? I don't like them Mommy...'" Smith wrote. "I'm so scared about my daughter starting school in September. Some of the bullies she encountered at her ballet class will be there too.

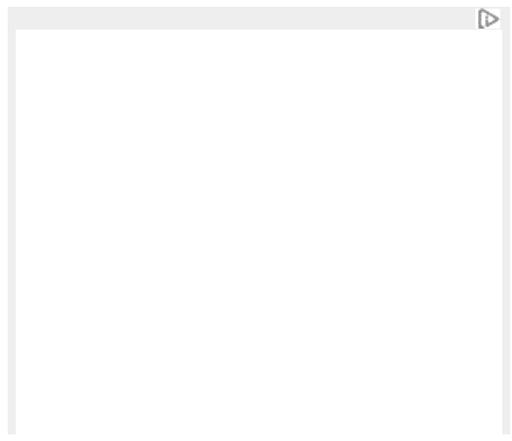
I won't be there to protect her. I just fear the emotional scars that this is going to cause." Smith, whose medical insurance was mediocre, couldn't afford to pay for otoplasty-surgery, a procedure for pinning back prominent ears. Fortunately, Dr. Niamtu, could still help. The Virginia-based surgeon tells Yahoo Shine that about 25 percent of his work on kids is performed pro bono, free of charge. "No one deserves to be made fun of for physical attributes they can't control," he says. Now the young girl is back at ballet.

More on Yahoo: [Cosmetic Surgery Subtracts Years, Doesn't Add Beauty](#)

According to the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, in the last decade, the rate of plastic surgery for children has gone up by about 30 percent, spurred, in part, by the increase in society's acceptance of cosmetic procedures as well as parents' fear of bullying. According to Niamtu, the most common procedures are otoplasty; mole, birthmark, and scar removal; and, to a lesser extent, correcting nasal deformities and breast reduction (for older teen girls). He's operated on children as young as a year old and recommends performing otoplasty before kids start elementary school, since that's when the teasing usually begins. He explains that because children don't have much of a social filter, they will comment on anything that draws their attention. "There have been studies that show that when children have these deformities or situations that draw criticism to a body feature, it can affect self-esteem and body image. It can impact them for the rest of their lives."

More on Yahoo: [Amanda Bynes Gets More Plastic Surgery — All Because of Her Mug Shot](#)

Another mother, Katherine Elliott, brought her six-year-old, Kendall, to Dr. Niamtu to remove a



follow shine

join us

- [Pinterest](#)
- [Google+](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [Instagram](#)
- [Tumblr](#)
- [We Heart It](#)

[Subscribe to RSS Feed](#)

more on yahoo

Your coffee, perfected!

dime-sized dark mole on her chin. "That's the first thing people saw — the very first thing people saw," Elliot told local news station WRIC. "They didn't see her; they saw a big brown mole on her face. She's had it since she was six months old, and it just got darker and darker." After surgery, the little girl was left with a pink spot that should disappear completely.

While cosmetic surgery may put a stop to some teasing, Dr. Karen Ruskin, a family therapist and parenting expert, tells Yahoo Shine that it sends the wrong message to children and may launch them on a path of pleasing others that won't be healthy as they grow up. "What somebody else says or does reveals everything about them and nothing about you. If you change for them, you are living for others instead of loving yourself." While she acknowledges that there are some exceptional circumstances in which cosmetic surgery might be necessary, she'd prefer that parents celebrate their children's physical quirks and help them develop coping mechanisms. "They have big ears? Say, 'Look at how cute they are!'" She adds that throughout life, there will always be people who will tease, bully, or criticize, and the only thing we can control is our own reaction. "How you cope will get you to a better place."

Niamtu agrees that cosmetic surgery is not always the answer and that some parents try to push a procedure on kids who may not need it or who may not care about changing the feature themselves. "If a child isn't getting bugged, let's wait and see how things go. Good cosmetic surgeons say no frequently," he adds. In Kendall's case, Elliot says she "firmly believes that when [her daughter] gets older, she'll look back on this and say, 'Thank you.'"

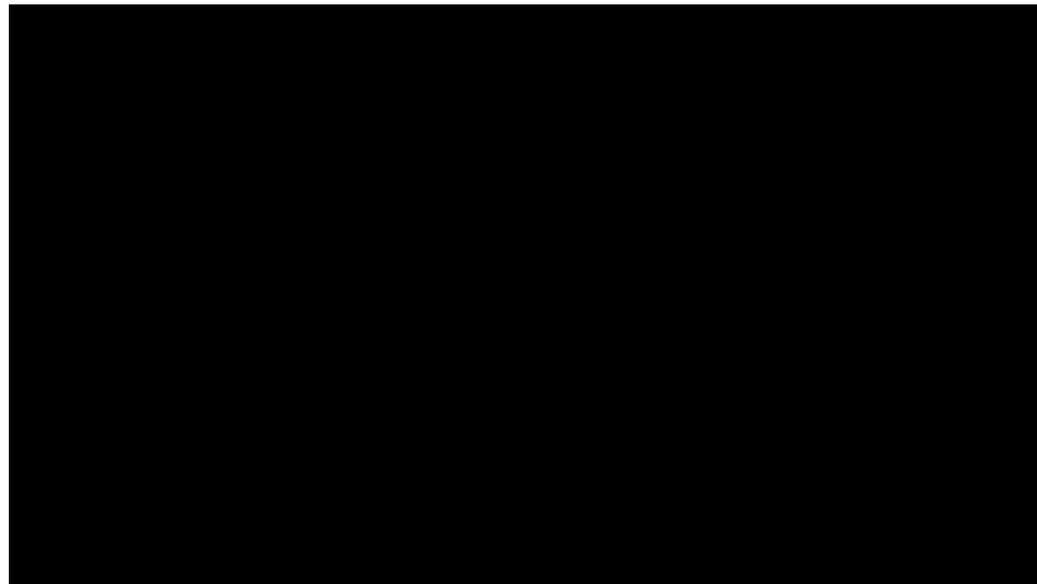
Still, Ruskin is concerned about the broader implications of the uptick in plastic surgery for kids. "We're becoming an airbrushed culture," she says, a society where it's no longer acceptable to look natural.

More on Shine:

[Teen Changes Name from 'Keisha' to 'Kyle' After Racist Bullying](#)

[Stars Without Retouching](#)

[The Mystery of Marilyn Monroe's Plastic Surgery](#)



WE RECOMMEND

- [Kate Middleton Lets Gray Roots Grow In; People Freak Out](#)
- [Kate Middleton's Ringlets Take the World by Storm](#)

FROM AROUND THE WEB

Sponsored

- [Keep Senior Loved Ones Safe With These Home Adaptations](#) (Comfort Keepers)
- [7 Hair Mistakes That Make You Look Old](#) (Daily Makeover)

- [Miley Cyrus Takes a Naked Shower Selfie While Preparing for MTV...](#)
- [Company Brings Back the "Chastity Belt" to Ward Off Potential...](#)
- [Jennifer Lawrence on Miley Cyrus: It's "Disgusting" That "Young..."](#)
- [How Wearing a Corset Every Day \(and Night!\) Changed This Woman's...](#)
- [The Foot Exfoliator That'll Disgust You—And Then Turn You Into an... \(YouBeauty\)](#)
- [Top 15 Slow-Cooker Recipes of All Time \(Food.com\)](#)
- [Know the Symptoms of Heart Valve Disease \(Better Medicine\)](#)
- [11 Holiday Casseroles \(Food\)](#)

Ad topics that might interest you

• Skin Care and Cosmetics

• Moisturizer for Dry Skin

• Top 10 Skin Care Products

• Cosmetic Surgery Centers

• Home Beauty Secrets

• Facial Cosmetic Surgery

• Skin Care Product Reviews

• Breast Augmentation

• Best Natural Skin Care Products

• Nose Job

Feedback 

[ads](#) 



SHINE FROM YAHOO

- [Today](#)
- [Style](#)
- [Well-being](#)
- [Love + Sex](#)
- [Food](#)
- [Home Design](#)
- [Parenting](#)
- [Holiday](#)
- [Horoscope](#)
- [My Shine](#)

ALSO ON YAHOO

- [Autos](#)
- [Finance](#)
- [Games](#)
- [Groups](#)
- [Health](#)
- [Maps](#)
- [Movies](#)
- [Music](#)
- [omg!](#)
- [Shine](#)
- [Shopping](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Travel](#)
- [TV](#)
- [Y News Alert](#)

[All Yahoo »](#)

TRENDING NOW

- Joan Jett
- Rod Blagojevich
- Powerball
- Pittsburgh shooting
- Andy Kaufman
- Winter cruises
- Nicole Scherzinger
- McKayla Maroney
- Jeff Probst
- Blackberry Z30

2013 Yahoo Contributor Network

[Yahoo Lifestyles Network](#) [Help / Suggestions](#) [Privacy](#) [About Our Ads](#) [Terms](#)