We've become accustomed to the use of technical textiles in sports- and protective-wear…but clothing collections for toddlers would appear to be another matter entirely. There is, after all, tradition. However, one mother saw things in a different light.



Taking technical textiles into kids' wear

Being a mother is a privilege, but it can also present a number of challenges as JB Sacallis, president and owner of Agoo Apparel, discovered. Ms Sacallis felt there were certain gaps in the market when it came to children's clothing and she decided to have a go at filling the void. Her aim was to design clothes that were practical as well as looking good and to use the latest fabric technology to produce apparel that would give children the freedom to be as active as they wanted to be.

According to Ms Sacallis, her son provided the inspiration for the Agoo brand. "I wanted clothes for him that would allow him to play and be comfortable and look stylish at the same time. I also wanted to make clothes that served a purpose, were practical and functional all in one," she explains.

Fabrics first

One of the key elements for the range was to identify suitable fabrics that would allow children to play and explore as well as providing a range of technical benefits. "We really focus on kids, what they are doing and how they are playing," explains the company founder. She says that making clothes that look good on a hanger is not enough; the garments need to offer performance benefits that can only come from using technical fabrics. According to the company, this is what sets it apart from other children's clothing firms. The key to the collection, Ms Sacallis says, is to "design with a child in mind and make the features that they need".

The Vancouver-based firm uses a range of technical fabrics to ensure that, whatever the children wearing them get up to, they are wearing the best clothes for the task. For example, it uses fabrics with a UPF 50+ rating so

Canadian children's apparel brand Agoo uses fabrics with high levels of performance, such as a UPF 50+ rating and moisture-wicking, in its collections

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that children, who are particularly vulnerable to overexposure, can play outside when the sun is shining. It also uses textiles that wick moisture away so that sweat is removed from the skin, enhancing the child's comfort levels and reducing the build-up of bacteria and unpleasant odours. This moisture management system can also help to eliminate chills and overheating.

According to the firm, its fabrics offer stain resistance, an essential property for children's clothing, which comes into contact with a wide range of substances every day. The company has also looked closely at the weight of its fabric offering. "We use a heavier weight of fabric for a comfortable drape and soft feel," says Ms Sacallis. Furthermore, the collection uses four-way stretch fabrics so that children can twist, roll and jump to their hearts' content, knowing their clothes will move with them.

On the move

And it is just this kind of lively activity that Agoo activewear is made for. Ms Sacallis explains that each garment is designed to be used for sport, whether the child is wearing it during the actual activity, or simply on its way there and back. "All our clothes consider active kids and active lifestyles, right down to our underwear that is designed with odour-resistant and hypo-allergenic properties," she says. Garments in the range include a baby sport dress, a sport tank and sport top.

In order to increase comfort levels, the company uses its signature Activo Stretch fabric, which contains 88% nylon and 12% spandex, in its activewear range. The fabric is said to offer flexibility and versatility, important qualities for children's clothing. Its durable rainwear has a soft, 100% polyester microfleece lining with a waterproof shell made from 80% nylon and 20% spandex. This combination helps keeps children dry and is also breathable. The company's outerwear is made from 100% wind-resistant nylon, which helps children to trap body heat inside while keeping wind and water out.

Other practical details that can affect the child's comfort have also been taken into account. For example, Agoo apparel is made using flatlock stitching, which is more comfortable and adds strength to seams. It uses tag-free labels so that children can have no complaints about itching or irritation caused by the labels in their clothes. Ms Sacallis says: "When you look at the moms with all their kids at gymnastics or 'gym and sing', they are all dressed comfortably in their active wear. The kids tend to be the ones running around, so I think it is very important for their clothes to be comfortable and functional."

She adds that a lot of children's clothes are fashionable or functional, but rarely both. "Think about how much a child is on the move during the day; their clothes need to meet those demands," she says. "As much as we love to dress our kids and make them look cute, that isn't always comfortable or functional."



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Other factors

In addition to the technical benefits and comfort considerations, Ms Sacallis explains that pricing has been a really important consideration for the company. She claims the answer to the pricing problem was to put herself in her customers' shoes. She says: "I am a mom and I know what it feels like to overpay or, in turn, not get what you paid for. I price everything keeping in mind how I would feel having to buy it and I want all my customers to feel they paid no more than for other brands, but got a lot more in return."

The company is also taking the environment into account, using materials such as bamboo and Repreve, made using recycled polyester fibres. According to Agoo, the bamboo in this case is fully sustainable, requires no pesticides and little irrigation, and is fully biodegradable. The range of benefits it offers are extensive: it is breathable and cool to wear, naturally antibacterial, non-toxic, moisture wicking, odour-resistant and offers a natural lustre. Meanwhile, Repreve reduces energy consumption at the manufacturing stage and conserves petroleum resources. The firm hopes that its clothing will not only enable children to enjoy the great outdoors, but that the environmental 'cost' of making the clothing will be as low as possible so that future generations can continue to do so.

Finally, an important focus for the company during the rest of this year is to make contact with groups that are promoting health and wellbeing for children. "We are reaching out to charities and organisations that support healing and healthy lifestyles for kids," says the company founder. The firm's plan for the year also includes expanding more into outerwear and bringing more functional fabrics to the line, particularly fabrics that are "kind to the environment".

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