

TOO MUCH *too young?*

Spray tans for four-year-olds... harmless fun, a treat for a 'princess', or a step too far? *Vitality* investigates.

I like having a spray tan because it makes me look good. I like having the same as mummy.' These are the words of a four-year-old girl called Tate, and they started a media storm that tore through the beauty industry. The controversy arose when beautician Jools Willis admitted on television that she spray tans Tate, her son Chayse, six, and daughter Darcie, 10.

Jools, who runs Hollywood Beauty Company in East Sussex, said she tans her children because she wants to help them feel beautiful and ease them into adolescence. She added that she doesn't just spray tan Darcie for cosmetic reasons, but that 'she is a dancer and when she does shows, the tan helps her under the stage lights'.

A public outcry and media feeding frenzy followed. Comparisons were drawn with 'exploitative' US beauty pageants and a fierce debate began

about whether children should be allowed in salons at all. Child welfare groups accused the 37-year-old mother of 'sexualising' her young daughter – and some even said she made her a potential target for paedophiles.

The news broke just three months after Michelle Devine came under fire for comments she made at the opening of her salon for children under 13.

At the launch of the hair and beauty salon, Trendy Monkeys in Brentwood, she told a local reporter that she would hold tanning parties, if clients asked.

Both salon owners were subject to such criticism because their comments came on the back of the release of a government report into

the sexualisation and the commercialisation of children.

It revealed that 90 per cent of parents agreed with the statement that 'these days children are under pressure to grow up too quickly'. It states: 'The first area of concern was about products that are seen to depend on, or to promote,

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the idea that children at quite a young age are more sexually mature than their chronological age suggests. That maturity might be physical, emotional or psychological, and the child may be aware or unaware of it.'

Now the media storm has blown over, Jools Willis is tight-lipped on the matter. When *Vitality* approached her to talk about her views on children having beauty treatments, she refused to comment, citing legal reasons.

However, Michelle Devine was willing to discuss the situation. 'I've had a hellish time, the press coverage was very negative. I admit I was very naive and what I said was a slip of the tongue. The truth is we don't even offer tanning treatments, just parties for little girls where they get to play make-believe for the afternoon.

'With the make-up application, we don't put any mascara or eyeliner on, just glossy gems that we stick around the eyes and a tiny bit of lip gloss. Afterwards, we'll have a tea party. It's a shame people can't be more positive, because the children absolutely love it.' However, tanning controversy aside, a question mark hangs over whether Michelle should have even opened a salon aimed solely at children.

Profit or loss of childhood?

There are certainly lucrative possibilities for childhood beauty. Market analysts Mintel recently conducted a survey of 6000 youngsters and found that more than six out of 10 girls aged seven to 10 wore lipstick, more than two in five wore eye-shadow or eye- >

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► liner, while almost one in four wore mascara and three in five wore perfume.

Amy Selby, director of the BABTAC award-winning Esque salon in Leamington Spa, says: 'My view is that children should be allowed to have the naivety that only children have. But you need to go with your common sense – if you can fix a problem, then it's something to consider.'

'I had medical approval to treat a boy of 11 with electrolysis who had a large facial skin tag. It was simple and it changed everything for him. But, generally, we have a rule that anyone under 16 has to have parental consent, and no child under 12 years old is allowed in the salon.'

'Early teenage years are a grey area because there isn't any right or wrong. I still think of a 14-year-old as a child, but if they asked for a spray tan, I would consider that a more sensible option than a course of sunbeds, which is something heavily linked to skin cancer.'

Michelle decided to open Trendy Monkeys when she spotted a niche in the market, after her young daughters started getting invited to princess parties. She tells *Vitality* that it is just 'innocent fun' and that it in no way sexualises youngsters.

'It took me two years to come up with the concept for Trendy Monkeys, but what people don't realise is that salons like this are really popular in America,' she says. 'Go to Disney World and

they've been doing it for years, but they don't get accused of sexualising kids.'

'Children aren't coming to me with a chipped nail and saying "can you fix this?". We don't cover little girls in make-up to look like tarts. What we do is have innocent fun by encouraging children to express themselves.'

How far should you go?

Michelle stresses that her princess parties are designed specifically for children. 'With the fruit smoothie facials, we use real fruit and nothing else,' she says. 'We let the children blend them up and apply it to their faces like

a mask. Our manicures and pedicures are just a little bit of sparkly nail varnish. There's no cuticle work.'

But Claude Knight, from children's charity Kidscape, is concerned about the idea. 'A lot of little girls will have experimented with their mum's high heels and lipstick. But what worries me is when it goes beyond playing and a child wouldn't understand the message it's giving out,' she says.

Many professionals are reluctant to carry out treatments on young girls for purely aesthetic reasons or in the name of 'fun'. Newly qualified therapist Penny Pratley runs her own business, Universal



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Therapy in Banbury, and has recently started waxing her 13-year-old daughter.

'My daughter has just begun having her legs and underarms waxed because it's become an issue for her,' she says. 'I was a little reluctant, but my reason is that her hair growth will become less dense as she gets older.'

'She also asked if she could get her eye-lashes tinted and I've said we'll leave it a bit longer. I do think it isn't just a case of the child's age, it's the mother who's responsible too.'

One mobile nail technician that *Vitality* spoke to has been giving manicures to her daughter since she was born, but says it is completely harmless fun. 'Believe it or not, I've been giving my baby girl a manicure since the day she was born and she will sit there quite happily while I file her nails,' says Edona Collins from Parkgate.

'She's now just over two and sometimes we have a bit of fun by using an aqua-based varnish on her, which washes off in the bath. But, on my clients, I wouldn't do a full manicure until they were at least 12 or 13, just because their skin is still forming and we know the damage it can do.'

Are you covered?

BABTAC members who do provide salon treatments for children under the age of 16 should make sure they are covered by their insurance. Julie Speed, BABTAC general manager, said: 'If they are under 16 then they need to have parental consent and a parent, or a responsible adult, needs to be in the room while they have the treatment.'

Sarah Cogin-Smith, who runs Looks Beautiful in Felixstowe, has been in the industry for 20 years and began hosting pamper parties for children five years and above in 2008. She says: 'A few years ago, my eldest daughter had some friends over for her fifth birthday party, so we painted their nails, put some make-up on, dressed them up in princess dresses and they all had a blast.'



TRENDY MONKEYS

“What we do is have a lot of innocent fun by encouraging children to express themselves”

'At the time there wasn't anything else around that focused on children's pamper parties, so I thought it would be a good opportunity to offer them to our

clients and we started to promote it in the salon,' says Sarah.

'I think the main difference is that everything we do is age-appropriate and it's about having fun. I wouldn't do a party for any children under five and I always make sure my salon insurance covers work with children too.'

On average, Sarah holds two to three parties a month and charges from £60 to £145, depending on the number of children and travelling costs.

But, pamper parties aside, how does Sarah feel about children coming into her salon for professional beauty treatments? 'I don't get that many children in the salon, apart from the odd special occasion and I always make sure their mum is there,' she says. 'I think these days children are developing at an earlier age and are having problems with their skin, so getting proper skincare advice would be beneficial.'

'As would waxing, if they're hairy and getting teased at school. In the past I've waxed a 10-year-old, but I would rather that than a child gets psychologically damaged about being hairy.'

Following the controversy that raged in the media, Trendy Monkeys has relocated six miles from Brentwood to Ongar, for a fresh start. Michelle says things are slowly starting to turn around since the move.

However, she admits that she's still having to work hard to try and claw back her reputation. 'Lots of people would have said no to interviews, but I'm a real fighter and I won't stop fighting until people know how harmless my salon is,' she says. **V**