

HOW YOUNG IS TOO YOUNG?

Lilliane Caron discusses waxing children. Have times changed? What is our duty of care as Beauty Therapists or Estheticians in these kinds of situations?

There are milestones in every mother-daughter relationship and hair removal is one of them. Once upon a time most mothers wouldn't have had to worry about this until puberty, but these days the conversation may start a little earlier than expected. If you asked me to put an age limit on when waxing became acceptable, I couldn't. I believe that some girls are too young to be waxed, but I also believe there is an exception to every rule. The real question is what is our duty of care as Beauty Therapists or Estheticians in these kinds of situations?

Times are changing

The general notion is that girls may start to be interested in hair removal once they hit puberty and hair growth spikes, but that is not always the case. While most young girls experience a small amount of hair on their bodies, I have seen firsthand, girls as young as seven with excessive hair growth on their legs, arms and face. This can be related to cultural and genetic factors, however I believe it is also a result of our changing environment. Children are physically developing a lot earlier than years gone by due to what we are eating and using in our day to day lives. Foods are full of hormones and as a result, girls are getting their periods younger – which means entering womanhood and everything that comes with it is also happening sooner. When I began my career, women would generally start waxing when they were about 18 but in today's society girls are growing up faster than ever before.

Social Influence

With social media being so prominent in our lives, children are being exposed to more and more things that would have once been beyond their years. Kids are seeing models and celebrities acting, dressing and looking a certain way, and of course want to mimic that look. It's not just celebrities that are influencing today's youth; their friends and families are playing a big role too. Kids as young as 10 years old have blogs, Instagram, Facebook and YouTube accounts. As adults, we can understand that most photos uploaded to social media are carefully styled, have filters applied and multiple photos were actually taken at slightly different angles, all for that 'perfect' shot. But young, susceptible minds don't always understand this.

Not only are young girls being subjected to unrealistic body images but young boys are too. Early on, boys notice women being represented in a certain way – with flawless, hair-free, skin. Because of the portrayal of woman in the media, there is a stigma related to hair on the body. The ability to differentiate between women and girls is becoming blurry. Children at school are surrounded by others who all have their own thoughts on facial and body hair. Some are bullied and tormented for hair growth that is completely natural. Hair on our bodies is not a new revelation; it is a part of being a human. Children should never have to worry about this. As adults we spend far too much time criticising ourselves and our flaws and it's upsetting to think that children are starting to do this from such a young age. With a whole new spotlight on hair removal and minors, we as therapists have to recognise and sympathise with this issue.

The Motive

We need to be able to spot the motive behind unwanted hair removal. If a child is being bullied or feels self-conscious about their body hair, I can completely understand the reason behind wanting to remove it. My concern is that children are simply jumping aboard the waxing train to be 'cool', not because they need to. When a child comes in with very little visible hair on their legs and without the supervision of an adult, this is where it gets tricky. In this type of situation I urge you to consider a few things. Does the child have extreme hair growth? Is the child suffering from bullying or peer pressure? Does the child participate in a sport or activity where it may be embarrassing for them to have hair showing? Swimming, gymnastics and dancing activities may require young girls to wear leotards or costumes that expose bikini, underarm and leg hair. It's easy to see how this would be embarrassing for anyone, especially those lacking confidence as their body is changing. All these are important factors and I believe each individual needs to be looked at on a case by case manner.



Mother knows best

Most of the time the decision for a child to be waxed or not will come down to the mother – and some mothers want their children to start waxing early. Perhaps they have their own insecurities from when they were a child or perhaps they feel pressure to keep up with what the other mothers are doing. One mother may get her daughters eyebrows waxed, and she will tell another mother, and that mother will tell another, and then before you know it you have multiple children booked in who don't even need their eyebrows waxed because the mothers think that it is a the normal thing to do. It can become a social norm in many circles. Mother's competing with one another is becoming more and more apparent and no mother wants to feel like there child is getting left behind.

As a parent, your role is to identify issues, educate and guide your children along the right path. While it is not our place to judge any parent on these decisions, it is our place to be there as a guide for mothers and their daughters and offer them some advice and education about hair removal in particular. This goes for mothers who may be starting their daughters too early, or for mothers who are scared of letting their daughters start too young. Often mothers will call us in for backup; after all, who better to explain the hair removal process than us? Children don't often realise that waxing requires regular maintenance and once they have started; they could be doing for the next 50 years. We need to highlight the bigger picture so they understand waxing is not just a once off thing, but a commitment they need to be ready to make.

Common Sense

I am a business woman, however when it comes to children I believe you need to set aside your business cap for just one moment. While we of course want to secure business, in these contentious cases we are dealing with young impressionable minds and it's extremely important to remember that. Often my rule is that if I am standing two feet away and cannot see any hair, then in my opinion there is no hair that needs to be removed. It ultimately comes down to using your common sense. It is our right to say no if we don't feel comfortable removing the hair, especially if the child is pre-pubescent or there is no guardian approval involved. You can always look at enforcing a policy for your salon such a 'children under the age of 16 may not get waxed without parental consent.' This way you and your staff are protected from any backlash you may receive from unaware parents.

The last thing any of us want are young girls sneaking around behind their parents backs or attempting shaving at home with no supervision or experience. At least if they are starting their hair removal routine with waxing, over time it will help to break down the hair follicle quicker and over time they will begin to notice less hair growth. Once they start, they should keep up with regular appointments. Generally with young clientele it is not necessary to wax every 4-6 weeks. Often every three or four months is sufficient – but again, this depends on the child's hair growth.

If removing hair is going to make a someone feel better about themselves and give them the confidence to walk around happy, then I am all for it. Don't forget that there is a slight discomfort involved with waxing, and some children simply do not have the pain threshold to cope with it, it often depends on their maturity levels. I would always use a hard wax for delicate areas such as face, bikini and underarms, and a creamy gentle strip wax for larger areas such as legs. Using a low temperature, high quality wax can help to reduce the pain associated with waxing. If you choose not to wax a minor, you could try to offer them a treatment other than waxing to boost their self-esteem, make them feel older and pampered. A mani or pedi, a facial or a massage is a lovely treat and could take their mind off wanting to wax.

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