

## Toddlers and tiaras arrive in UK: Girl, 3, set to parade in high heels and a bikini for Britain's first baby beauty pageant

**Next month Lexci will parade down a catwalk in high heels and a bikini for Britain's first U.S. style baby beauty pageant. She is just three years old...**

By [Alison Smith Squire](#)

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Her eyes are big, blue and adorned with eyeshadow and mascara. Her mouth is accentuated with pink lipstick and long, blonde curls tumble down her back.

She has a wardrobe bulging with pretty, strappy dresses, and each month another £400 worth of new garments are added. Among her many new acquisitions is the attention-grabbing outfit Lexci will be wearing for her moment in the spotlight — high heels and a bikini-style two-piece. If Lexci was in her late teens, her glamorous routine would hardly be worthy of comment. But, disturbingly, she is only three years old.

And although she is barely more than a baby, Lexci is about to enter her first beauty pageant — the Miss Mini Princess UK contest.



Baby beauty queen: Three-year-old Lexci, with mum Emma, will be judged on her looks, poise and outfits in the Miss Mini Princess UK contest

Open to girls from babyhood to the age of 13, in its blurb the contest promises to deliver ‘the most glamorous in pageants’. Next month, Lexci will be one of around 100 British girls parading down a catwalk in Leicester at the UK’s first American-style beauty pageant aimed at such young children.

The contest will include a Baby Princess category for children under 12 months, and a Tiny Princess category for one-year-olds. Lexci will take part in the Little Princess category for two and three-year-olds, where she will be judged on her physical beauty, how good she looks in an eye-catching outfit, a talent such as dancing and, finally, her poise in an elegant evening dress.

The contest has already attracted huge amounts of controversy, not least because of fears that little girls — some still in nappies — will be adopting inappropriately sexualised poses, often in skimpy clothes and caked in fake tan and thick make-up.

Claude Knights, director of the children’s charity Kidscape, sums up campaigners’ worries: ‘I’m very concerned about this sort of contest for such young girls. Not only is there the “Lolita” issue of little girls being sexualised, dressing as adults and not being aware of the sort of feelings this can provoke in others, but they are also too young to give informed consent.

**'I don't see how a little girl can be sexy. Pageants are nothing to do with sex. Lexci's dressing up for a pageant, she's not walking to the local shops dressed like this'**

‘We would also be worried about the long-term consequences of placing such importance on looks at such a young age. The problem in the UK is we have no age boundaries to protect these children.’

So what on earth is Lexci’s mother, Emma Turner, thinking of, exposing her little girl in such a way?

Emma, 21, defiantly insists that way too much fuss is made about the pageants and says she sees absolutely nothing wrong in the fact that Lexci will be parading around in heels and a bikini-based outfit.

She says: ‘Little girls wear bikinis on the beach every day, so I don’t see what the difference is between that and a sparkly two-piece for a pageant. Lexci often tries on my shoes, so hopefully she’ll be able to manage in heels.’

Emma’s even unconcerned by the most worrying aspect of these pageants — that they are, as critics believe, ‘parades for paedophiles’.

She says: ‘I don’t see how a little girl can be sexy. Pageants are nothing to do with sex. Lexci’s dressing up for a pageant, she’s not walking to the local shops dressed like this.’



Worrying: Mum Emma says she doesn't see how her daughter's poses can be seen as sexy

Emma, from Heanor, Derbyshire, and her partner Callum, 20, a factory worker, entered Lexci for Miss Mini Princess UK after watching the hit television show, *Toddlers & Tiaras* — a controversial American reality TV series that follows the world of child beauty pageants.

She says: ‘It looks like a lot of fun, and Lexci is always dancing in front of the television copying the little girls on the programme. She’s a girly-girl who enjoys shopping with me for clothes and dressing up.’

‘She already has a wardrobe full of clothes — I probably spend around £400 a month on her outfits, and I’m planning to spend £500 on outfits for the pageant day as she’ll need a few changes of clothes, including eveningwear.’

Emma’s unperturbed by stories from American pageants where girls as young as four have been paraded in padded bras. One mother was pilloried last year for dressing her three-year-old as a prostitute in thigh-high PVC boots. Another little girl performed a pole-dancing routine, while one dressed up as a mini Dolly Parton, complete with fake bottom and breasts.

Horror stories abound of young girls' drinks being spiked with powdered sugar and Red Bull by their own parents to create so-called 'pageant crack' and 'go-go juice' to boost their energy levels and keep them alert through performances.

So strong is the opposition to such pageants coming to this country that the British organisers of Miss Mini Princess UK admit they're already receiving hate mail.

Still, none of this seems to be putting off the mothers of young contestants. Laura Taylor, a 25-year-old hairdresser from Barnsley, South Yorkshire, says she has no concerns about her eight-year-old daughter, Chloe, taking part.

Little Chloe owns ten pairs of high-heeled shoes, hundreds of pounds worth of new clothes and has blonde highlights put through her hair every few weeks. She regularly browses through fashion magazines and scours celebrity music videos on the hunt for style ideas.

Where most eight-year-old girls can't see beyond Barbie bicycles and sticker albums, Chloe's focus is on fashion and precision grooming.

Even in an adult, this level of preoccupation with looks would be seen as rather shallow. So why does her mother not only allow her to be heavily made-up, coiffured and spray-tanned, but actively encourages it?



No concerns: Laura Taylor, left, sees nothing wrong with her daughter Chloe, eight, wearing make-up and revealing clothes for the pageant, while nine-year-old Jade Naylor's mum Michelle hopes it could lead to her daughter having a career as a glamour model

‘Chloe loves to experiment with clothes,’ Laura answers. ‘She already has a wardrobe bursting with strappy tops, gorgeous little dresses, shorts and minis, so it’s going to be great fun for her to dress up in something glitzy.’

For the pageant, Chloe will wear foundation, blusher, heavy mascara and lipstick, and her mother is planning to give her ‘big hair’, created using special giant curlers. ‘I’ve told Chloe I’ll book her in for a spray tan and we’ll re-do the blonde highlights she had put in a month ago.’

Like Chloe, most of the girls taking part in the contest — billed as ‘the USA-style beauty pageant with British attitude’ — will be competing for the first time.

## **'Jade might want to be a topless glamour model when she's older. A pageant like this will help develop her confidence'**

‘Chloe will be wearing a revealing outfit that will be glittery but tasteful,’ says her mother, who is spending more than £500 on her daughter’s three costumes for the pageant. ‘I don’t see anything wrong with that. As I see it, little girls who haven’t developed physically have nothing to flaunt.’

According to the Miss Mini Princess UK website, the competition will follow the American format. The first round will focus on physical beauty, the second on the most glamorous outfit, the third round will give girls 90 seconds to display any interesting talents and the fourth round will see them in evening dress.

The winner will be crowned with a tiara and receive a cash prize and a modelling contract.

If the American pageants are anything to go by, the dance routines are likely to be shocking, with very young girls gyrating provocatively to music, or miming — inappropriately — to songs about sex appeal.

‘We’ve already received some emails accusing us of sexualising children,’ says competition spokesman Shanice Senghor. ‘But we’ve launched this

glam pageant because we realised there was a huge demand for something like it in the UK.'

Child pageants in this country have tended to avoid criticism by promoting natural beauty and avoiding grown-up glamour and make-up. But, Shanice says, Miss Mini Princess UK offers something more radical.

'We believe little girls just want to dress up to the nines,' she says. 'They want to be like the pop stars they see — they want glitz and glamour and big hair, and so do their mums.'

'Our competition will be about little girls wearing lipstick and revealing, glamorous clothes, but it's what many little girls and their parents want.'



'Little fashionista': Kirsty said she has entered her daughter Adele in the beauty competition to boost her confidence and indulge her love of dressing up

That is what shocks many detractors most — that mothers who should protect their children are the ones pushing their vulnerable daughters into an intimidating arena to be judged on their looks and encouraged to act like adult, sexualised women, when many are too young even to have started school.

Five-year-old Adele Jones was signed up for Miss Mini Princess UK by her mother Kirsty after the pair watched U.S. pageants on reality TV programmes.

Kirsty, 25, says: 'I was a very shy girl and would have loved the chance to do something like this. Adele can't wait to dress up like the girls on those shows, and I think doing it will give her confidence — the sort of confidence I never had.'

For all the negative publicity, these pageants form a lucrative £3 billion-a-year industry in America, with promoters earning as much as £70,000 per event.

## WHO KNEW?

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They are also the subject of television shows such as *Toddlers & Tiaras* and *Little Miss Perfect*, watched by millions worldwide. Viewers see young girls having their eyebrows waxed, their milk teeth fitted with temporary veneers — known as ‘flippers’ — and their hair dyed. Often frightened, and occasionally driven to tears by sheer nerves, contestants have frequently travelled thousands of miles to take part in a pageant.

Competitions like this don't come cheap. The parents of seven-year-old Eden, one of the stars of *Toddlers & Tiaras*, have reportedly spent £40,000 on her pageant career, with tanning sessions, photo-shoots, professional dance choreography and costumes costing £2,000 a week.

As a result, many parents end up in serious debt, and yet the numbers of children taking part in pageants is booming, with 250,000 of them competing in more than 5,000 annual events in the U.S. alone.

Kidscape's Mr Knights asks: ‘What happens if these girls grow up and are no longer as pretty? And how do they feel if they don't constantly come first?’

In France there are official calls for a ban on such pageants because of concerns children are being sexualised. If introduced, it would end beauty competitions for under-16s. Here in Britain, however, there are no shortage of takers — including Adele, who has only just started primary school.

‘Adele's a proper little fashionista,’ says mother Kirsty. ‘She loves having her hair straightened and likes to try my spray tan. On special occasions she wears false nails: they look so pretty.’



Too much, too young? Girls take part in the U.S. show *Toddlers and Tiaras*, a similar pageant is coming to the UK next month

Kirsty, who has another daughter, Eva, two, with her partner Richard, 26, a contractor, has already made the trip from the family home in Bangor, Wales, to have Adele photographed in London for a modelling portfolio.

Is Kirsty not worried that she is encouraging her daughter to grow up too quickly? Or that she's placing an unhealthy emphasis on appearance?

'Little girls have always wanted to dress up and look like their mummies,' she says. 'Some of the American mums take it quite far — I don't think many British mums will be stuffing their children's bras — but the American girls always look as if they're enjoying themselves.'

'Adele is no different from many of her friends who find make-up and clothes fun. I can't see anything wrong with it.'

Michelle Naylor, 42, from Leicester, has entered her nine-year-old daughter, Jade, for *Miss Mini Princess UK*. She and partner Paul, 39, who works for the local council, believe it could be her first step towards a modelling career.

'Jade might want to be a topless glamour model when she's older,' says Michelle, who works part-time in retail. 'Paul and I are not prudish. Jade is a stunning girl, and if she wanted to model later in life, we believe experience in a pageant like this will help develop her confidence and pave a professional career path.'





Controversial: Mother Wendy Dickey sparked outrage when she dressed her daughter up as Julia Roberts' prostitute character from *Pretty Woman* in the U.S. *Toddlers and Tiaras* show

Jade is already a veteran of the child beauty industry, having modelled for billboard advertisements and clothing companies.

Her mother says they were attracted to the pageant by its promise of '100 per cent glamour', but denies she's channelling her own ambitions through her daughter. 'It's Jade who wants to do this,' she insists. But at nine, how can Jade possibly be mature enough to know what she wants — or what's best for her?

Michelle says: 'Jade already wears make-up when she's with friends. She does get what she wants, and she wants to feel grown-up. I don't see any harm in it. She wears high-heeled boots when she's not at school and a little bra — if you've got the figure, why not flaunt it?'

'We are still finalising what Jade will wear for the contest, but Paul and I have no problem with it being revealing. People might criticise that, but she has a beautiful little figure.'

'This is all in the context of a beauty pageant, and there'll be lots of other girls in similar outfits.'

Michelle denies being a pushy mother. 'If I thought Jade was uncomfortable in the spotlight, I'd be the first person to tell her not to do it. But she just comes alive when she's the centre of attention. If she wants to do it and enjoys it, I'll support her all the way.'

The problem is that what seems to women like Michelle a harmless hobby represents, to others, a dangerous world in which young girls risk sacrificing their precious childhood innocence.

Whether these mothers and daughters come to regret taking part in pageants like the one next month remains to be seen.

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2128429/Miss-Mini-Princess-UK-Lexci-3-enter-Britains-US-style-baby-beauty-pageant.html#ixzz1tMnPBI79>