

The white shirt that claims to be impossible to stain

A H! THE white shirt. The centrepiece of any capsule wardrobe. Effortlessly chic under a suit or sweater, it is a stylish staple no woman should ever be without — no woman without children that is.

A mum in a white shirt is a walking target for sticky fingers, accidental flicks of spaghetti sauce and a full juice tsunami. It's why I haven't worn one since 2010 when my eldest daughter Matilda was born; it is bad enough dabbing cereal off my shoulders with a tissue on the way to work in the morning but dabbing something white? I shudder to think.

But, that's all about to change, because there is now a range of unstainable white shirts. You can pour a cup of coffee down your front and the liquid will simply bead on the surface and slide off. Should any residual marks be left, you can rinse the shirt under the tap, and, without even getting wet, the stain will wash off.

Unstainable shirts don't claim to be completely bomb-proof — Biro, make-up or really ground-in dirt won't just rinse off in the same way but even they should shift in a normal 40-degree wash, minus detergent or softener with bleach to protect the anti-stain magic.

Exactly how it works is a trade secret but the gist is that the shirt is covered in millions of microscopic hairs, 100,000 times smaller than a grain of sand, that are applied to natural fibres such as silk or cotton.

Water or other liquids hitting the fabric then sit above the surface on these hairs instead of penetrating it so they just slide off or can be rinsed away.

T HESE minor miracles are the brainchild of designer Melanie Moore, 31, who recognised the need for blouses for working mums besieged by mucky hands.

'I couldn't believe something like this didn't exist,' says Melanie who is also the brains behind shirt subscription service Elizabeth & Clarke which, for a quarterly fee, provides customers with a box of shirts every three months, as the seasons change, with no shirt costing more than £25.

With many white shirts in the four-item collection — three silk blouses, one with a collar, a more casual collarless button-down shirt and a sleeveless version, plus a T-shirt, all in sizes 4 to 18 — it wasn't long before entrepreneurial Melanie was wondering how her customers could keep them pristine.

'White shirts are so classic, but are hard for some people to wear,' she says.

'We assume women are clean but mothers are always getting covered in food, so when I saw some stain-repelling technology at one of our mills, I couldn't stop thinking about whether it could be applied to textiles themselves.'

Melanie enlisted a chemist



Spill test: Jess and Bibi put the shirt through its paces with wine and pasta

face as promised. Nothing soaked in, it just sat there as if I was wearing armour, or a raincoat and the brown residue that didn't slip off simply rinsed away under the tap. Unbelievably the fabric didn't even get wet and I could put the shirt straight back on.

In disbelief I thought it was time to up my game with the red wine. At the sink I tipped a good measure down the front and yep — truly — it just beaded off and drained away down the plughole. Miraculous.

Hold on to your credit cards though; really viscous liquids like mayonnaise, mustard or jam are just not slippery enough to rinse away.

Similarly, ground-in or really rubbed-on dirt, the kind that comes, say, in the form of pudgy three-year-old fingers covered in spaghetti sauce, are also not quite so obliging.

Bibi's tomato handprint would not budge under the tap, I'm sad to report.

So, while a shirt that can withstand half a glass of Merlot down it is truly remarkable, the reality is, the stains I am usually dealing with are not so much spills, as full-on splats, smudges and smears.

However, there is a silver lining. Melanie says that for stains which do sneak past the liquid repelling nano-fibres or won't rinse away, there is an extra level of stain-releasing technology built into the fabric beneath the nano-fibres which works when the material is washed.

You put it on a normal wash, albeit without washing powder or fabric softener that contains bleach. It can also be tumble-dried. If you're worried about hygiene, don't be. Mine has been through the wash a few times and sweat, stains, smells and — happy day — Bibi's handprint, were removed in a basic 40-degree wash.

According to Melanie, the shirt is likely to stay pristine for another 50 washes, or at least until it is several years old.

In the past, a stain like this would normally mean a soaking in a bucketful of bleach, or worse, the bin, but the amazing results of my test have reassured me that my shirt will survive until my teeny horrors are old enough to keep their sticky paws to themselves.

■ **FOR more information visit unstainable.ec.**

by Jess Spiring

and began a year-long research project. To raise money, she turned to crowd-funding website kickstarter.com where people donate money to help designers get their ideas into production, usually in return for the product once it is available or for a significant discount.

Her target was £20,000, but she raised that in only a month. 'We ended up with £165,000 altogether,' says Melanie 'We were overwhelmed; 3,000 supporters from all over the world joined us on Kickstarter.'

'Each pledged money based on the Unstainable shirts they wanted to buy; £15 for a short-sleeve cotton top, £33 for silk blouses. Lots bought all four.'

It's no wonder mums like me were so keen to sign up for Melanie's innovation.

Most of us have had to invest in a raft of stain-removing sprays, powders and pre-wash treatments and, in my case, accept the frustrating reality that white shirts and children just do not mix.

Melanie is hoping that her Unstainable technology will change all that. She was so confident that it worked, she had

the fabric tested by the prestigious American Association of Textile Chemists and Colorists, which confirmed its extraordinary ability to repel oil, water and alcohol-based liquids.

The blouse I tested, The White (named after Betty White in TV's *The Golden Girls*) was flatteringly cut, generously long (so perfect for tucking in), hearteningly crease-free straight out of its packaging and felt no different from any other crêpe de chine shirt.

I was just delighted to be wearing my favourite colour so long before the girls' bedtime!

M Y road test came in the form of a supper with my two girls, Matilda, six, and Bibi, four, comprising spaghetti in tomato sauce, a salad dripping in balsamic vinegar with a side order of red wine for me.

If it could survive those three, it could survive anything but, to say the least, I was sceptical that it could withstand such carnage.

Wouldn't you know it though, just when you want to get splattered, you don't, so eventually I told the girls to go for it and just cover me in food. They couldn't believe their luck!

I felt like a sitting duck clad in pristine white and it took all my strength not to shy away as my eager progeny approached, full forks held aloft.

But it worked! The balsamic dressing did bead on the sur-

Soup starter — for your cat

IF YOUR beloved moggy has sophisticated tastes, she'll probably lap up Purina's new Gourmet Soup for cats.

The first cat food of its kind, made from finely cut delicacies floating in a 'refined broth', the single-serving, 40g pouches come in four posh flavours: Classic 'with tuna and whole

shrimps', anchovy, finely sliced chicken and chicken and vegetable flavours. It certainly makes a change from the half-eaten mice you find under the bed, but what will you be serving your pampered ball of fur for dessert?

■ **PURINA Gourmet Soup, 78p/40g, available from Morrisons and Tesco.**



Cheryl and her 16-year-old son

by Antonia Hoyle

LIKE most mothers of teenage boys, Cheryl Leach is accustomed to a fair amount of chivvying.

Her son, Jordan, might be 16 years old and 5ft 4in tall, but he still needs reminding that his socks won't pick themselves off the bedroom floor and that his pizza needs taking out of the oven before it's burnt to a crisp.

Yet 42-year-old Cheryl's devotion to him knows no bounds, and when Jordan comes home from school, drops his bags on the floor and slumps on the sofa, she is overcome with delight to see him.

So much so, in fact, that she pulls his face to hers and gives him a full-on kiss on the lips.

Did that last sentence require a second glance? Did it make you shift a little uncomfortably in your seat? If so, you wouldn't be alone.

The issue of whether or not a parent should kiss their child on the lips has long been mired in controversy. Is mouth-to-mouth contact between family members a natural expression of love or an inappropriate transgression?

Last year, child psychologist Dr Charlotte Reznick caused outrage after suggesting it was wrong for a parent to kiss a child on the lips at any age.

'If you start kissing your kids on the lips, when do you stop?' she asked. 'As a child gets to four or five or six and their sexual awareness develops, the kiss on the lips can be stimulating to them.'

Yet for all the ensuing fury at her comments, the sight of parents kissing their children on the mouth certainly seems to make others feel awkward, not least when the offspring in question is a teenager or fully fledged adult.

Last month on the ITVBe series *Sam Faiers: The Baby Diaries* — in which the reality TV personality and her boyfriend Paul Knightley are filmed preparing for the arrival of their son — 27-year-old Paul and his middle-aged mother Gaynor were captured kissing on the lips.

With Gaynor's eyes closed and her arm draped lovingly around Paul's neck, they looked more like an odd age-gap couple than mother and son.

Social media users recoiled in horror at the 'creepy' and 'cringeworthy' kiss, with Gaynor branded a 'controlling mother-in-law from hell'.

BUT Cheryl — a midwife from Swindon who also kisses her two younger children, Ella, eight, and Kaydon, seven, on the mouth — is unrepentant at her behaviour. In fact, she is furious at the insinuation there is anything untoward about her kissing her teenage son.

'It is ridiculous and pathetic that people are making out this is something sexual,' she says. 'I don't care what people think. I will never stop kissing Jordan on the lips and he will never stop kissing me either.'

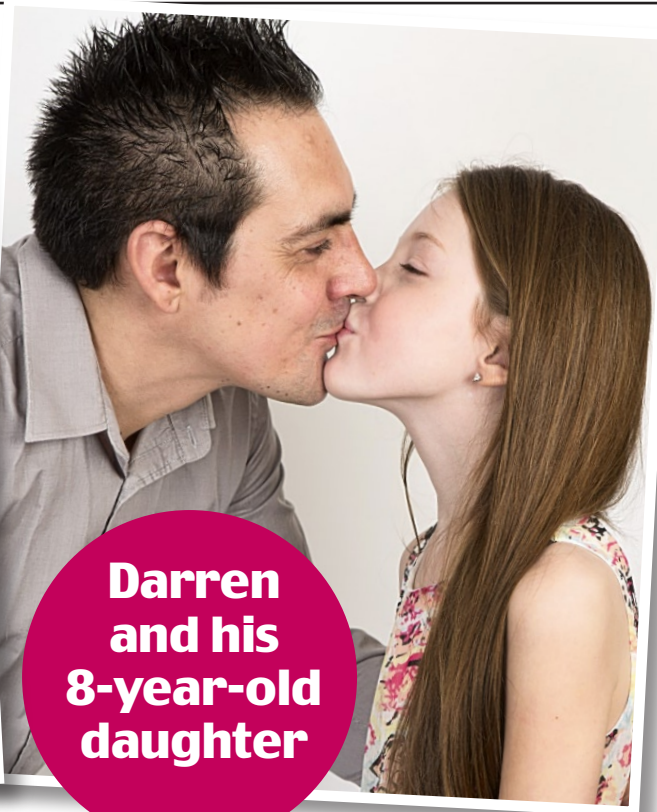
It is a bold claim, but one that Jordan seems to substantiate. 'I will carry on kissing Mum when I'm an adult,' he says. 'I've done it for such a long time that I just see it as normal.'

Part of the reason the pair are so close is that Jordan's father left when Cheryl was pregnant.

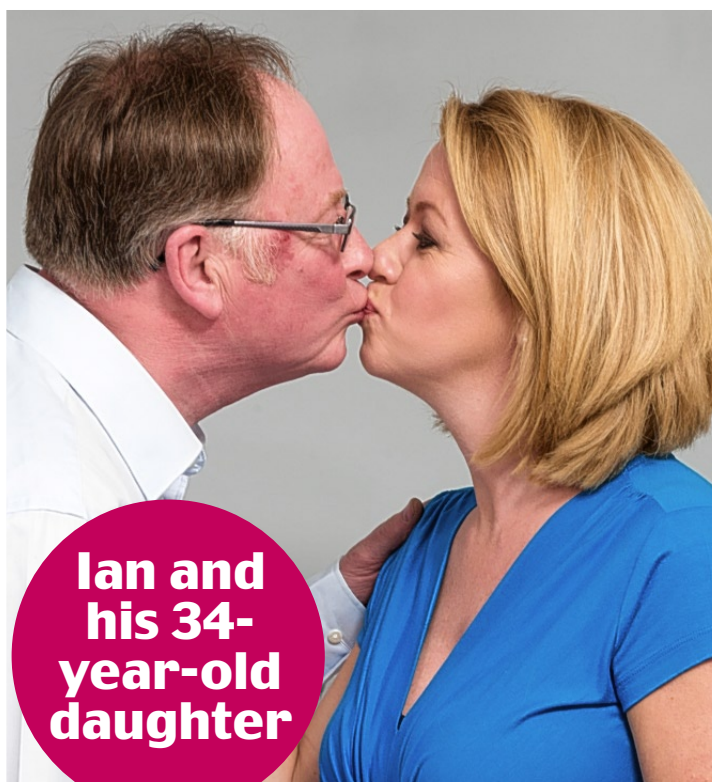
'It was just the two of us for the first few years, we developed a special bond,' says Cheryl, who is now married to Darren, 44.

'Jordan slept in my bed and when he started asking questions about sex I was happy to answer. We have always had a very open relationship.'

Their kisses only last a second or two, unless Jordan is in a more jovial mood, in which case he draws it out longer and adds a 'mwah' sound. His



**Darren
and his
8-year-old
daughter**



**Ian and
his 34-
year-old
daughter**



**Barbara
and her
6-year-old
grand
daughter**

Pictures: WARREN SMITH / JAMES CLARKE / LUCY RAY

When should parents stop kissing their child on the lips?

As a psychologist argues it's always wrong, the mums and dads who insist they'll never give up

girlfriend, Daisy, seems surprisingly unbothered by her boyfriend's habit, especially considering that Cheryl and Jordan also hold hands in public — even at the school gates.

'My mates say "aaah, cute" sarcastically — but it doesn't matter to me what they think,' insists Jordan. To

Cheryl, who also kisses her parents on the lips, a mere peck on the cheek would be a desultory gesture.

'Kissing on the lips shows more affection,' she says.

But while Darren, a construction worker, is happy to kiss the children, he isn't always as loving with his wife.

'Darren and I don't kiss a lot,' Cheryl concedes. 'In his eyes he doesn't need to kiss me to prove he loves me. It upsets me, and perhaps this is why I kiss the kids more. I can go for days without kissing Darren — but not without kissing my children.'

Unsurprisingly, Dr Reznick —

author of *The Power Of Your Child's Imagination* — doesn't share Cheryl's opinions: 'A teenage boy is more aware of his sexuality than a child, so I wouldn't recommend a mother kissing him on the lips.'

'Children thrive on being touched on their forehead, cheeks or hands. The lips are different because they have more nerve endings and are more sensitive to stimulation.'

'People don't like to hear this but the lips are an erogenous zone and feel-good chemicals that are associated with sexual arousal — including serotonin and oxytocin — are released through lip-kissing.'

'Babies and young children aren't thinking about their sexuality, but they are still being stimulated.'

And what if the child is an adult? 'I don't see what all the fuss is about,' says Jocelyn Miller, 34, who still kisses her 61-year-old father, Ian, on the lips. 'It's my way of showing how much he means to me... Until I

was 13, Dad would come in to my room every night to kiss me and tickle my arm until I fell asleep.

'I'm close to Mum and we kiss on the lips, too, but not as often — I suppose because I'm a daddy's girl.'

Jocelyn, from Tunbridge Wells, Kent, doesn't kiss in public, however. 'I don't think it's perverted at all, but it's a private gesture and I'm aware some people think it's odd,' she says.

'I'll kiss Dad on the lips to thank him for support. We kissed when he was helping me get over a break up with an ex-boyfriend and before we left for the church on my wedding day. As a little girl I'd always kiss him on the lips and in my mind I'm still his little girl.'

Asking Ian why he kisses his daughter on the lips prompts an outpouring of emotion.

'I love her so much. I couldn't love her any more than I do. Oh, I'm getting tearful now,' he says.

But Ian does not kiss his 24-year-old son on the lips. 'Perhaps it is something to do with Jocelyn being of the opposite sex,' he says.

ALTHOUGH it is entirely platonic, Jocelyn admits her husband is non-plussed. 'He says it's up to us... but to him, lip-kissing is something between adults who are attracted to each other.'

For some, the worrying trend towards the sexualisation of children means lip-kissing should only ever be an adult activity.

'I am entirely against the sexualisation of children, but this is completely different and shouldn't invite criticism,' says psychologist Emma Kenny. 'It is about nurturing your child, letting them know how special they are.'

Amanda Hewlett, 35, regularly kisses her mother, Barbara, 61, and father, Dennis, 63, on the lips as well as her daughter, Kelcey, six, and 13-month-old son, Jak.

'It is a measure of how out-of-control society has become and how worried people are about being branded paedophiles that it is described as wrong,' says Amanda, who is from Heywood, Lancashire.

'I do it all the time, although it is obviously not a smooch and lacks the passion and intensity of a kiss I'd share with my fiancé.'

Amanda adds: 'My dad has a moustache so it tickles a bit.'

Barbara — who also kisses Amanda's 26-year-old brother, James, on the lips and her grandchildren — says: 'I have kissed my children like this since they were little. I think it stems from my parents dying when I was in my 30s.'

'I didn't tell them I loved them as much as I should have, so I was determined to show affection towards my own children.'

Amanda says: 'I don't want my kids growing up thinking they're not loved. They would be far worse off without this kind of affection, and I think it's sad and pathetic that anyone believes otherwise.'

Houseplants to hang from the ceiling



THESE intriguing Japanese houseplants called 'Kokedama' — are the must-have online fad right now.

Kokedama (which translates as 'moss ball') are made by removing a houseplant or small tree from its pot, surrounding the roots in caked mud, wrapping the root system in moss and string to create a hanging plant that is a work of art. Making them yourself

sounds a bit of a faff to us (though plenty of websites explain how), or you can just buy ready-made Kokedama from £24.95 at tranquilplants.co.uk.

Many large garden centres also have them on sale.

Do it yourself Kokedama kits, courses and even — shhhh! — hassle-free artificial Kokedama are also available from notonthehighstreet.com.