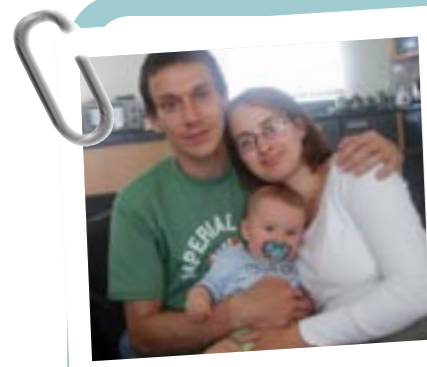




'PERK UP OUR SEX LIFE!'



THE CHALLENGE

Katie Campbell, 25, lives with her partner Chris Bee, 27, and their 20-month-old son Cameron in Sheffield. Katie and Chris were only together six months before Katie got pregnant and now with a baby their sex life is suffering. Like many new dads, Chris feels Katie has a 'new man' in her life, while the demands of motherhood mean making love isn't a priority for Katie. Can our expert help them bring back that lovin' feeling?

ESTHER PEREL IS AUTHOR OF *MATING IN CAPTIVITY: SEX, LIES & DOMESTIC BLISS* (£7.99, HODDER & STOUGHTON) 'Sex makes babies, so it's ironic children threaten the very thing that created them. Parenting means being dependable and responsible. But a good sex life thrives on spontaneity and risk. With nappy changes and broken sleep, sex can become a struggle. Keep talking, make time for each other and put some playfulness back in your relationship.'



THE EXPERT'S VIEW

THE ACTION PLAN

- Surprise your partner. Pick a different restaurant or wear something new – it helps keep things fresh.
- Talk to your other half not as your partner, but as a man you're getting to know. Focus on enjoying his company, rather than mentally going over your list of chores.
- Motherhood means selflessness and caretaking. What a turn-off! Allow yourself some pleasures, like a relaxing, long bath. You'll see yourself as a woman again.
- Take off your 'mummy' gear and wear something that makes you feel sexy.
- You're always hugging your child and, equally, no couple can survive on a diet of quick pecks. Lots of caresses, kisses, tender words and humour will get you both in the mood.
- Sex is more than just intercourse. When a couple have grown apart they need to get back the closeness. A massage is a great way to do this.
- Don't leave sex till last thing at night – you'll be knackered. Be spontaneous, like when you first met, and ditch the bedroom!
- Discuss how you can bring back seduction, anticipation and flirting. These are the real foreplay and should last longer than five minutes...

KATIE'S DIARY

'Our relationship has always been very physical. When we first got together we were enjoying spending time just the two of us and were planning to travel. But six months after we met I got pregnant and everything changed. Our sex life became virtually non-existent.'

'For the first five months I had bad morning sickness and some bleeding so sex was the last thing on my mind. And as soon as I had Cameron I became scared to make love. We gave it a go after my six-week check but it hurt and that put me off for the next four months, which wasn't easy for Chris.'

'I breastfed until nine months and felt my body belonged to my baby not my bloke. With the constant night feeds, for me bed meant sleep, not sex!'

'Like many new mums, I hated my body. Before I had Cameron I'd lost over two stone, going from a size 14



Katie felt her body belonged to her baby, not her bloke!

to an eight. But afterwards I didn't like Chris seeing me naked, I wanted the lights off in bed and felt inhibited. I'm now a size 12 and still feel overweight and unhappy. It makes a big difference to how I feel sexually.'

'Chris doesn't pressure me but he knows I'm not happy and sex is still sporadic. I feel like my job is being Cameron's mum and everything revolves around him. Sex is the last thing on my list. But I miss being close and now feels like the right time to do something about it – for both Chris and me.'

WEEK ONE

'Chris and I both read Esther's tips and made a point of sitting down to talk. We both accept we will never be exactly as we were but to be closer again would be fantastic. Chris doesn't hassle me but I realise it must be frustrating for him.'

'We always go to bed when we're tired and, as Esther says, sex becomes the last task of the day. So for once we went up to bed early. We kissed and cuddled and just talked and I didn't feel so stressed about going straight to sleep. The next day Chris had a day off and took Cameron to the park so I even got some time to myself. I had a bath



A close relationship between parents makes for a happy child

off the hook for a few more weeks. We've definitely had more cuddles this week, talked more and even held hands! Although they're only small steps, it's beginning to make a difference.'

WEEK TWO

'I'm a terrible culprit for "dressing down". Cameron and I often stay in our pyjamas all day if we've got nothing planned. Even when I do get dressed, I usually opt for one of Chris's T-shirts because I don't want to show off my figure. But I've taken what Esther said on board and made more of an effort

managed some early nights and because I didn't feel so tired and stressed, sex happened naturally, which was great. It certainly made us think we should do it more often!'

'After having Cameron I worried about everything – my body, lack of sleep, my caesarean scar – and whenever Chris tried to come near me, I pulled away. It's become a habit. Now, slowly, I'm getting close to him again, and it feels really good!'

WEEK THREE

'Before we had Cameron, Chris and I were very active. Chris loves climbing and we used to run together. He still does all that but I've totally stopped. I felt things couldn't be the same and let everything go instead of finding a balance. So this week we took Cameron in his three-wheeler and jogged together in the park. It felt just like old times but better.'

'Cameron is my life but I realise that I have to put time aside for Chris and myself too. Putting everything into your baby doesn't actually help your relationship. We've spent a lot of family time together recently, which has been wonderful. The challenge has not only helped our relationship but made us feel closer as a family, too.' **M&B**

'Now I'm getting close to Chris again. And it feels really good!'

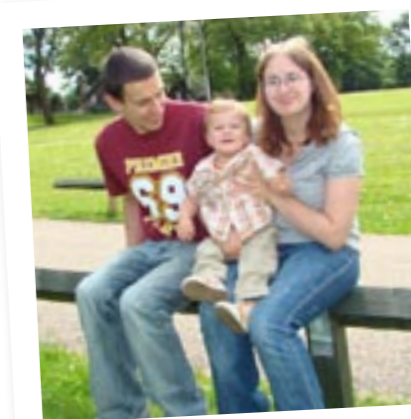
and relaxed on the sofa with my book, which was lovely, though I did feel a bit guilty as I'm so used to rushing around.'

'Chris is certainly making an effort since reading the tips. We've also talked about how I feel, too. I'd pushed sex to the back of my mind, which I know isn't fair on Chris. It's easy to just let everything go and before you know it, you're not intimate any more. Even when we do have sex, Chris feels I'm only doing it to please him, letting me

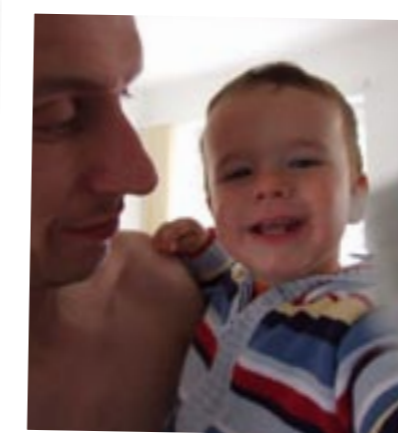
this week. I straightened my hair and wore something nice. I do feel more feminine and Chris has noticed too. I used to think "it's only for Chris", but I realise it does matter what I look like – it makes me feel better about myself.'

'We arranged a night out and my sister came to babysit. But while I was getting ready I decided I didn't want to go. I know I'm an overprotective mum but nobody looks after Cameron like I do! I relaxed once we got out, though, and we really enjoyed our evening. I know Chris would like to do it more often.'

'It's easy to talk about Cameron but not so easy to talk about your relationship, so it was reassuring to discover we still get on as a couple! We've turned the TV off a couple of nights this week and just cuddled and chatted on the sofa instead. We also



The challenge has brought everyone closer together



Chris and Cameron: the two main men in Katie's life

KATIE'S VERDICT

'Chris and I have learnt that communication is crucial. My advice to other mums is to be honest and keep talking to your partner. By doing that, we've been able to look at where we were going wrong rather than ignoring the problems. We've made time for each other. We know we can do it now – we just have to keep working at it.'

'Katie now realises it's not babies who extinguish the flame in a relationship, it's the parents who fail to keep the spark alive. Maintaining an erotic and emotional connection between you as a couple is the biggest gift you can give your child. Katie should keep doing what she's begun. It will only get easier...'

THE EXPERT'S VIEW