



MUM'S THE WORD

Is romance possible when you have small children?

Mother of five, Claire Calvey, weighs up the evidence...

It's February which means the shops are heaving with heart-shaped balloons, loved-up teddy bears and over-priced single red roses. Yes, Valentine's day is upon us already; a holiday which always fails to instil much of a sense of romance in me to be honest, not least because its patron saint died after a rather nasty beheading and the fact it has its own massacre named after it.

With five (going on six!) children, it's hardly surprising that romance doesn't play a massive part in my life at present, and I'll take someone hoovering the living room for me over a dozen red roses any day. But according to the experts even a normal amount of children is likely to play havoc with your relationship, with romance being the first thing to go out the window once the little ones start to arrive.

From sleepless nights to childcare issues, having children can create problems you hadn't even considered when there were just two of you. Take bed-sharing for example; nothing kills passion quicker than a snoring toddler lying horizontal across the bed – take it from one who's been bed-sharing for 15 years and counting!

Being a parent can be expensive and stressful and it's hard to keep romance alive when you're bickering over school camp fees or the fact that the three-year-old has stuffed a whole loo roll down the toilet. AGAIN! Much as I love my husband he's not the most romantic person I know so romance was compromised before the children even arrived. Raised in a rather austere household where feelings were suppressed and spending money on anything other than necessities frowned upon, he's never been great at expressing his affections and his gift-giving skills are almost non-existent.

To be fair he's gotten slightly better over the years, but not much. His idea of a romantic gesture is a bunch of flowers from the Maxol station and the cheapest box of chocolates he can find at the supermarket. To him it's only the thought that counts and the less he spends the more chuffed



he is with himself. Occasionally he gets free gifts from sub-contractors or suppliers at work, and on more than one occasion has arrived home looking rather pleased with himself before presenting me with a baseball cap with a tower crane company's logo on it or an XXL t-shirt from a concrete supplier, as if he were presenting me with diamonds (but please don't pity me, dear reader, I more than compensate for his miserly ways with some very effective self-gifting!).

The experts say time alone together is vital for keeping your relationship healthy, but this can be difficult to organise when you have small children, and I remember commenting to my husband - on the way to the hospital for the birth of child number four - how nice it was for us to be alone for once. The irony of this remark was not lost on either of us by the way.

The other problem with finding time for each other is that once you have kids, even if you can afford a babysitter, chances are you are so

knackered by the end of the day, finding the energy for each other is a challenge too far. On the rare occasion that we actually manage to make it to a restaurant for dinner, the conversation on whether to go on to a bar or nightclub afterwards inevitably morphs in the unanimous decision that a cup of cocoa in front of Jonathan Ross sounds far more preferable. Yeah, rock 'n' roll we ain't!

So is there any hope for this romantically doomed couple with too many children? Will we ever inject passion back in to the relationship? I'm hopeful that we can, although it might take a few more years of bed-sharing and general knackeredness before that happens. Like everything in life this is just a stage, and one day we'll look back on this time with fondness and nostalgia (and maybe a little relief). Until that time comes you can keep your chocolates, balloons and posh dinners out. Nothing says 'I love you' quite like the sound of the Hoover running downstairs while I enjoy an uninterrupted bubble bath alone upstairs. Right now I'll gladly settle for that.