

# Sex *NOT SO* AND THE SINGLE GIRL

## Kids? I'm way too chicken

Jo Usmar *locates her mothering instinct... in a coop in her garden*



**I** have a confession: I don't 'get' children. Now, before you send Mumsnet round to present their case with a flip chart of pics of adorable kids, hear me out. I *like* children – I think they're funny when they're trying to walk or talk and end up just mumbling and falling over. I also think they're cute when they're so chubby they have no necks, and little rings around their ankles and wrists. But that's about as far as it goes. As soon as they *can* walk and talk, I have absolutely no idea what I'm meant to do with them. You might as well stick me in a room with a bunch of quantum physicists. I'd feel the same: paranoid, embarrassed and totally convinced they all think I'm an idiot.

I've managed to hide this terror successfully for many years. I always make sure I'm not alone with a child who might expect me to actually do something to entertain it. This has been made infinitely easier by the fact that my boyfriend Ben is *amazing* with kids. He knows exactly what they'll find funny and what they might want to do. He's never patronising or too adult. He'd never suggest to a two-year-old that they sit in a corner and read a book on their own, as I did recently. (It was a picture book. I didn't know they'd start eating it.)

People we know are starting to have kids and it's becoming harder and harder to avoid that 'Would you look after Rosie/Jack for a minute?' moment. The other day I was left alone with a four-year-old and Ben returned to the room to find us both just staring awkwardly at the ceiling

in silence. 'You hate kids, don't you?' he ventured. 'No!' I cried. 'I like them. 'We just... have nothing to say to each other.'

One day (in the far-distant future) I *would* actually like children, so I was starting to worry... And then we got chickens.

No, we don't live on a farm and we're not wife-swapping hippies. We live in a flat in north London and are lucky enough to have a little garden – so we stuck chickens in it. It's like *The Good Life*, just without other animals or dungarees. They live in a coop with colour-coordinated food and water bowls (I'm not ashamed of this) and they lay eggs every day. I'm obsessed with them. I actually enjoy cleaning them out and chasing them off fences. And I can turn any conversation around to the chickens: 'You just redecorated your bedroom? I just changed the kind of straw I use in the chickens' house? I've become one of

*those* people who never stop talking about their offspring. I even show people photos. In fact, I've included one in this column. Aren't they adorable?

They've made me feel a little better. If I can talk to chickens, maybe one day I'll know what to say to a child. At the moment, though, I don't think, 'Please stop pooing in your water bowl' will cut it. Although depending on the kid, it might...

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