



# THE *Kissing* INDEX

Snogging is so tied up with intimacy, sex and coupledness that how much you do it might be a barometer of the health of your relationship, says Lois Cahall. And that's why it's often the first thing to go...

**KISSING AND SEX IS LIKE THE CHICKEN AND the egg in reverse:** which one *goes* first? Talk to anyone in 10 years of wedded, erm, bliss, and you'll most likely find out that if he or she is not getting laid, he or she is certainly not getting kissed. A rather corporate male CEO friend of mine once told me, 'I knew my marriage was over when I was walking down Bond Street with my wife and the couple in front of us stopped, then kissed. Passionately. My wife's response was, "What a horrible public display of affection." To me, it was a personal display of affection. And I liked it.'

When it comes to the sexual experiences of youth, it's our first kiss - snogging, getting off, copping off, French kissing or whatever you called it - behind the bike sheds, in the village hall, in the park, that's often our fondest memory. And most pairings begin with an awful lot of it. So when it comes to our longer relationships and marriages, why does the kiss disappear? Eleanor\*, a 39-year-old teacher from south London, complained to me a few years ago that her husband never did it any more. That he was happy to have sex but would only kiss when she *made* him do it. Fast-forward to the present and she's left him, for a romantic who loves to snog.

According to Sheril Kirshenbaum, research scientist and author of *The Science Of Kissing: What Our Lips Are Telling Us*, kissing is, in fact, a form of addiction. 'Dopamine is the same neurotransmitter >>



## 3 STEPS TO REPAIRING INTIMACY (VIA KISSING)

by Dr Sue Johnson, clinical psychologist and author

involved in doing a line of cocaine. It primes us to want more.' It's also a form of mating ritual - scientists have suggested that during the act, we decode our new partner with our mouths, and we can tell if they're compatible at a biological level. Or not, as I'm sure you probably know from any disastrous date you've ever had.

'It allows lovers to taste each other, and taste and smell are basic triggers for attraction, familiarity and comfort,' says Dr Sue Johnson, clinical psychologist and author of *The Love Secret*. 'It's most frequent at the beginning of a relationship, when lovers are literally hungry for physical and emotional connection,' she says. 'But kissing can wane as we focus less consciously on our relationship and become preoccupied with life's chores and struggles.' A friend, Jane, told me she was recently in a Starbucks when she saw a couple making out like mad. Her first thought was 'get a room'. But the next was 'those two are definitely having an affair'. You've probably done the same - assumed no grown-up in an established relationship would ever go for it like that.

**I'VE ALWAYS BEEN A KISSER KIND OF GIRL,** believed in the chemistry of the kiss. I love the passion of it, what it represents. I love the old-fashioned movie lip-to-lips, first a peck and then a full-blown make-out session. But I've also been married and had two daughters and, let's face it, in day-to-day, get-to-work-on-time life, we can't be swapping saliva all morning at the front door.

Do most men even want to make out like in the big Hollywood movies of the past? I wondered this to a male friend, a man who's so handsome you would think he's being kissed 1,000 times a day. He told me sheepishly, 'Kissing. I'm bereft when it leaves a relationship. Doing it with the person you're firing pheromones at is wonderful, isn't it? Why does it disappear? Is it because it's more intimate than sex? Prostitutes will have sex. Hell, they'll even perform oral sex, but, the story is, they won't kiss.' It's true, sex workers traditionally don't, agrees Dr Johnson. 'It's a sign of affection and closeness reserved only for lovers, our way of communicating that a person is very special to us.'

Does kissing go into decline because it's seen as foreplay? Meaning even if you have a brief snog, are you promising that sex will follow? If the relationship isn't going well, kissing can feel hollow, says Dr Johnson. 'Many of us don't ask for kisses or hugs, believing that if we have to ask, they do not count as real signs of caring. Sometimes we see a kiss as simply a trick to get us to agree to sex or provide our lover with sexual release.'

1 When we help people repair their relationships, suggesting they hug or kiss when they are still angry with each other or hurting doesn't help. The first step to repairing connection is often simply to admit that you have hurt each other and so you are both feeling threatened. When you love someone, fears of rejection and being deserted automatically come up. Sharing softer emotions invites a lover to be closer - we show ourselves and this makes us safer.

2 The second step is to be able to ask for what you need to feel safe and special. You might say, 'I want to know you can see I'm hurt and that it matters to you.' You only need to ask for what you need, in simple terms.

3 The third step is to offer physical closeness and caring - but be sensitive to your lover's signals. A kiss doesn't have to be a prelude to sex; it can be an invitation to move closer and let down our guard. There is evidence that gazing at our partner and intimate touch turns on oxytocin, a 'cuddle' hormone that turns off fear and triggers a sense of comfort and trust. This is what allows us to relax into sensuality and sexuality.

loved.' Move into an honest - and specific - request for what you want. People are often too broad in their requests, saying things like, "I want more passion." But your partner isn't a mind-reader. Even if he requests something that surprises you, which isn't your thing, try not to judge. Work really hard not to frown if your partner answers your question with, "I really would enjoy it if, while we are kissing, you gently bit my lower lip. And maybe, sometimes, not so gently." Your job is to find out how you can best give him the love he's looking for so he, in turn, can do the same for you. That's how you keep the love alive.' With a lot of kissing, it turns out. ■

On the other hand, it might just keep a relationship going. Clare, 48, a librarian from Whittlesey, Cambridgeshire, thinks one of the reasons there's no sign of the seven-year-itch in her marriage to Andrew, a carpenter, is because they've kept on snogging. 'I do think making out is more intimate than making love; we like nothing better than cuddling up on the sofa together and this often leads to a snogging session. It's an easy way of expressing my love for him, and him for me.'

A sex-therapist friend tells me, 'I think kissing is related to intimate communication. During the early phases of a love affair, there are long hours of intimate talk. There are also long sessions of kissing. I think the two are related. Kissing is an emotional way of getting to know the other person. As a relationship wanes, it often diminishes along with the intimate talk. It could be because we don't have to seduce the other person any more.'

Which leaves the question: what happens when you stop kissing the one you love? How can you integrate passion all the way through the life of a relationship? In fact, it might be the first thing to go, but it can also be the place to restart a relationship.

'For most of us, a kiss is the promise of something more,' says marriage counsellor Mark Rutherford. 'I have patients in my practice who are 80 years old and still talk about their 'first kiss' with their one true love. It can be the gateway to our deepest longings around love, passion, romance... 'The process of re-romanticising takes work,' says Rutherford, 'but kissing is the perfect place to begin. Start by saying what your partner has been doing right in that area - 'I love that you always give me a kiss before you leave for work. It makes me feel