

SESSION 2 PSYCHOSEXUAL COACHING

A one-day session with sex coach and psychosexual therapist Dee McDonald provides a neutral environment where couples can safely discuss their relationship.

Tested by: Sunshine Jackson, 30, a documentary editor, and Jason Underhill, 33, an animation producer, who have been a couple for four years and live together in central London.

Their aim? To get their sex life back to how it was and not to worry so much when they don't have sex all the time.

BEFORE

Sunshine on sex with Jason:

'we were friends before we got together. I had no expectations about the sex, but it exceeded anything I'd experienced before. 'Then, about a year ago, sex started to suffer — we were both working hard and were constantly shattered. It culminated in a big argument, with Jason



complaining he wasn't getting enough sex and me shouting back that I felt pressured. Since then, we've been too scared to tackle the issue — so therapy will be good for us.

Jason on sex with Sunshine:

'Like any relationship, it took Sunshine and me a while really to be ourselves, faults and all. I think, when that happened, the sex changed. Thrilling sex was replaced by more intimate and comfortable sex — perhaps less exciting, but it was good sex all the same.

'The sex itself isn't the problem: it's getting to the point where we're going to have sex that's the issue. We're rarely in the mood at the same time and it can dwindle to once a fortnight, without us noticing. I've started to feel that if I suggest sex, and Sunshine doesn't want it, I'm imposing. I feel guilty, as if I'm not considering her needs and I'm hurt, as any man would be. I'd like us to be able to talk about having sex without arguing.'

IN THE CLASSROOM

Sunshine: 'I was worried something might come up in therapy that could damage our relationship, but when I spoke to the therapist, Dee, on the phone before the session, she was perceptive and tactful. This made me feel she would be someone I'd be able to open up to.

'In the session with Dee and Jason, I admitted that the longer I've been with him, the less sexy I feel. I have a ~vc nurse's outfit, which Jason loves, but in the last year or so I've started to feel stupid in it. Dee explained that, at the beginning of a relationship, sex is easier because you're playing a

role anyway — the "look at foxy me" role. But the more your partner sees the real you, the more ridiculous dressing up can then seem. I was so relieved just to have got that issue out in the open.

'Next we did a visualisation exercise, when Dee asked us to

“ I have a PVC nurse's outfit, which is one thing Jason loves, but in the last year I've started to feel stupid in it ”

close our eyes and imagine a room which held all our sexual fantasies and thoughts. We had to pick just one thing that stood out. Jason said, "Guilt-free sex — I don't have that any more," which shocked me.

'The realisation that I'm making him feel like his sexuality is an imposition on me was terrible. But because Dee was there, it didn't turn into an argument. I explained this

wasn't my intention, and then why I didn't always feel like having sex. I felt we'd really understood each other.

'At the end of the session, Dee asked which one thing I'd change about my sex life. I said, "I'd like to want more sex." It made me tearful, but it felt so good to admit that.

'Over supper that evening, Jason looked me in the eyes and I thought, "He's really gained an insight into how I feel." I also thought he'd been worried I didn't fancy him, but now he knew that that wasn't true." Jason: 'I was looking forward to the coaching

because it was going to be a whole day together, doing something just for us. But I was anxious it was a sensitive issue. 'Dee was a lot younger than I expected but she launched into the discussion so easily, we barely noticed. The therapy room was a beautiful, little wooden house at the bottom of her garden — very different from the plain classroom I'd imagined. 'Dee asked us about our past and our parents' attitudes to sex. My parents are very liberal, which is why I have a no-guilt, secure approach, whereas Sunshine's found it harder to see her as sexual, so she finds it difficult to leave the "little girl" behind and key into her sexual side.

'During the session, I realised I could encourage Sunshine to be more sensual by being more gentle in getting her in the mood. using massage is one way.

'The fact that Dee could interject as mediator if I brought up a contentious issue made me open up more. I explained how Sunshine can talk herself out of sex, and gets defensive, thinking, "Can't you see I want to sleep?" 'Sunshine admitted she sometimes feels pressured into sex. She's said this before but, because we were on neutral ground, I was able to see her point and explain more clearly that this wasn't my intention. She realised she's misinterpreted me — it's not that I'm hassling her for sex, it's just my way of showing that I fancy her.

'Dee helped us find out that we have to stop seeing sex as

THE THERAPIST POSED BY MODEL



something we're owed. One way she suggested we do this is by using "delayed reciprocation". One night you're the giver — you give your partner a head massage, for example; the next, they cook you dinner. It gets away from the idea that if you give, you have to receive immediately.

'It put my mind at rest when Dee said it's rare that both partners feel like sex at the same time. I've heard Sunshine say she wishes she could be more in the mood, but to hear it again felt good. It's easier to deal with things when they're out in the open.

OVERALL VERDICT

Sunshine: 'The session allowed us to have a proper conversation that otherwise we'd be too afraid to have. We've learned that what we're experiencing is normal, it isn't a nightmare, and now I feel able to talk about it in a much calmer, more rational way. Our

conversations about sex are already freer and less fraught. Lots of my friends thought we were mad doing the session, but having heard me talk about it, they want to go, too — especially the boys. In the week since the workshop, we still haven't had much time for sex, but I feel a lot more positive.' Jason: 'Sometimes, I think you get lazy with sex and forget to check that the other person is OK. I learned we should talk earlier, before those niggles escalate. We feel braver now that we aren't going to hurt each other if we bring up the subject of sex, which, in turn, will improve our sex life. I already feel that our barriers have come down.

For an appointment with Dee at The Centre For Sexual Wellbeing in either London or East Sussex (www.sexualwellbeing.co.uk),

info@sexualwellbeing.co.uk.