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# RELUCTANT MOTHERS

## A year ago Femail spoke to six of Britain's youngest mums. So how are they coping with life now?

**A DISTURBING** new report reveals that half of all girls under the age of 15 who have had intercourse regret doing so. Most feel pressurised into it and realise too late that they are not mature enough to deal with the emotional aftermath. For those who get pregnant, the consequences are even worse. Last May, six underage mums told Femail their shocking stories. One year on, we decided to see if they, too, regretted their experiences...

by CHRIS MORRIS

**EMMA DICKSON, 17, has a daughter, Libby, 20 months. Emma lives in Bromley, Kent, with her parents. Libby was born when Emma was 15. The baby's father, Dan, then 18, left Emma three months into the pregnancy but they are now back together. She says:**

**W**HEN I gave birth to Libby, I was scared and felt very alone, even though my mum was with me. I had a five-and-a-half-hour labour and I was lucky that I didn't need any drugs or gas and air. Libby's dad had promised to help look after her, and when he walked out on me I thought I'd never forgive him. We'd been together for four months when I fell pregnant. We'd had sex a few times but had always used condoms. This time, I'd had a few drinks and just let it happen. I didn't think you could get pregnant the first time you didn't use any protection.

I was so in love with Dan that I thought things would work out for us. But ten weeks into the pregnancy, he told me he didn't think it was the right time for him to have a baby and broke off all contact. I was devastated.

I bumped into him again in a pub when my mum and dad were babysitting. I felt very hostile after the way he'd treated me. But instead of arguing he joked that we must stop bumping into each other, which broke the ice. After that, we sat down and talked. Dan said he wanted another chance. We've been back together for a month now and I'm very happy with the way things have turned out.

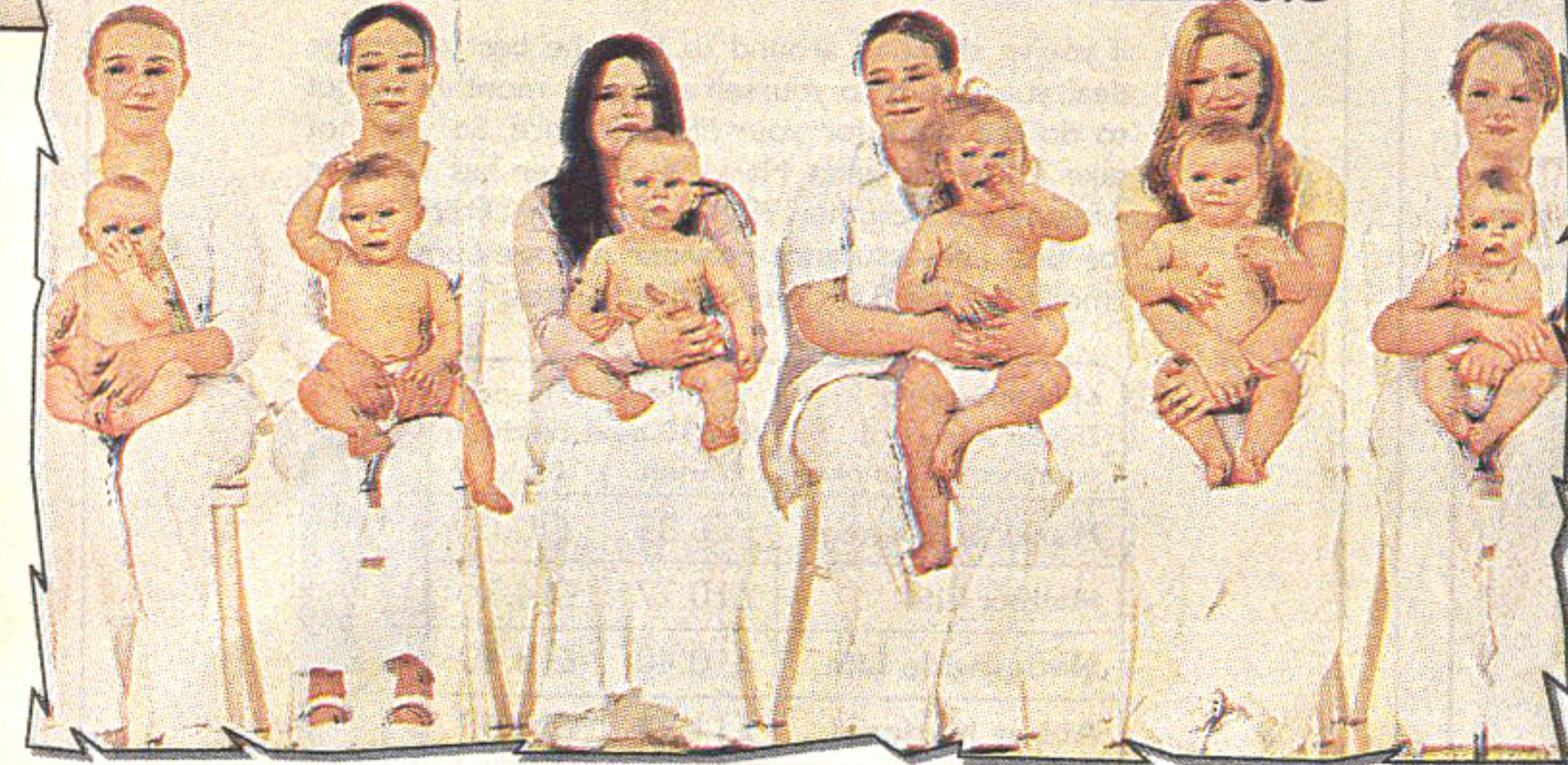
I knew having a baby would be hard work — and it has been. But the hardest part has been coping on my own. It's awful when you're exhausted and worried about this tiny thing that can't communicate with you and not having anyone to share that with. But I think all that will be easier now Dan is around.

He's already talking about having more children, but I've told him: 'No way.' Not because of the hard work, but because I want to concentrate on getting some more exams and finding a career. I'm going to college in September to study Spanish. By then, Libby will be old enough to go to nursery.

I know I was too young when I had Libby, and in that sense I do regret what happened. But even though I was underage, I felt the time was right to have sex with Dan. These days, lots of girls are ready at the age of 14 or 15 to make a proper decision about sex. I



## TEENAGE MOTHERS



was sure about my partner and eventually things have worked out for us. I feel I've been lucky. This time last year, the most I dared hope for by now was to be in a stable relationship. And I am — with her father.

**KIRSTY HANDS, 17, has a daughter, Chloe, two. She lives in a rented house in Leicester. Chloe was born when Kirsty was 15 and her boyfriend, Joe, was 17. They are still together and he now works as a carpenter. Kirsty says:**

**C**HLOE had a meningitis jab the other day. She is ill at the moment and it's really upsetting because she won't settle. It's things like that which you don't think about before you have a baby. I certainly didn't expect all of the hard work and worry that go into looking after them — the sleepless nights and constant attention they need.

I was going through a rebellious stage when I had sex and conceived Chloe. I'd been seeing Joe, her father, for a year. I knew about contraception but friends had told me that people try for years to have a baby, so I didn't worry. It was a

terrible shock when I found I was pregnant, but luckily Joe has stuck by me. I got three GCSEs but I'd been expected to get As, so I don't have the choices that I could have had. But there is still time. I want to train as a counsellor and work with teenagers. I'll tell them not to have a baby too young. Maybe they'll listen to me.

The truth is, I wasn't ready to take the decision to have a baby and I don't think any girl of that age is. My goal when she was born was just to get my life back on track, which I think I've done. I just wish my boyfriend would help with Chloe more.

**STACEY EDWARDS, 15, has a son, Jordan, two. She lives with her parents in Wednesbury, West Midlands. Her boyfriend, David, now 17, left her when Jordan was seven months old. Stacey says:**

**M**Y SON is great now he's old enough to play and talk. You can have a proper conversation with him, which makes it far more rewarding. When the contractions started, I didn't know what was happening, and it was really frightening. My stepmum and David's mum took me straight to the hospital but

friends were having sex at that age, I didn't really know anything about contraception and didn't like to ask. My boyfriend told me he'd already had sex with someone else and I thought he'd call me frigid if I didn't have sex with him. When I missed two periods, I was petrified. I knew I must be pregnant and for months I tried to hide the bump. I thought about running away, but luckily my stepmum found out and she told me everything would be OK.

When the contractions started, I didn't know what was happening, and it was really frightening. My stepmum and David's mum took me straight to the hospital but David refused to come, even though he knew I really wanted him there. David, who was 14 then, left me when Jordan was seven months old. He wasn't much of a dad — he was out all of the time. I hated him for leaving me, but now I just think it's his loss. I'm not bothered about him any more because Jordan makes me so happy.

I'm doing GCSEs next year at an education unit for schoolgirl mums. My teachers are expecting good grades from me. I was in the top sets at school before I had Jordan, and I'm determined to catch up. At times, when I'm exhausted and feel like I'm living the life of a

middle-aged woman rather than a teenager, I have regretted what's happened. Certainly I was too young to start having sex at 12. If I could do things differently, I would wait until I was at least 15 or 16. When I'm 16, I'm hoping to get a flat of my own. After that I want to go to college and get a job as a secretary. Perhaps I might have been able to do something more ambitious, but you can't turn back the clock. I had Jordan and I just have to accept my life is about him.

Things have worked out better than I could have expected when I got pregnant. Although I'm not with Jordan's father, I'm managing to get my life back together.

Everything happened so fast. Five days after the doctor confirmed I was pregnant, my contractions started. I went to hospital and they told me I'd need a caesarean section because my body was too young to give birth. I was confused and scared, but everything went OK and six weeks later I was back at school. Things have been easier for the past year because I feel more responsible for Sasha. At the same time, I've been able to get on with my own life a bit more. I'm doing my GCSEs this year — I'm taking nine. I want to do something for myself when Sasha is old enough, although I'm still not sure what. Having a baby so young has meant that I've not had much time to think about it.

I haven't had a boyfriend since Sasha was born and I don't want one. I have a strong bond with my daughter and I don't want anyone messing that up. Besides, life is hard enough just looking after a baby, let alone having to cope with a relationship. The older Sasha gets, the easier life becomes. She's three now and can do more things for herself, such as washing and going to the toilet. It's been hard but in the long run I think having Sasha has made me a stronger person. You have to be strong because someone else is reliant on you. I didn't have many expectations of how my life would

**JENNY TEAGUE, 15, has a daughter, Sasha, three. She lives with her parents in Poole, Dorset. She has not seen her baby's father, now 17, since she discovered she was pregnant at the age of 12. Jenny says:**

**B**ECAUSE I was so young when I had Sasha, I just couldn't accept that she was really my daughter and it took me ages to bond with her. Now she's older I find it easier to relate to her. She has her own personality and I enjoy her more. I was Britain's youngest mum when I had her. I was only 12 and didn't have clue I was pregnant — my periods hadn't even started. It was only when my sister spotted stretch marks and told Mum that she took me to the doctor. By then I was seven months pregnant. If I knew then what I know now — that you can get pregnant the first time — then I would never have had sex so young. There was no way that I was ready emotionally to have sex, let alone to deal with the outcome.

I hated the experience, too. Afterwards, I wondered why I'd bothered. I was terrified about the birth and felt very lonely. The other girls at school called me a slag and my mum and dad were furious. Dad even thought about kicking me out, but luckily he relented.

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Picture: TIM O'SULLIVAN. Styling: TRUDI WALLACE