



GROWING TREND FOR AUSTRALIAN COUPLES TO STAY FRIENDS AFTER DIVORCE

I'll be there for you

Michael Corcoran and Sallyanne Hartnell.

RELATIONSHIPS

JOANNA HALL

When celebrity couple Lisa Bonet and Jason Momoa announced they were “parting ways” in January, they vowed to remain friends for the sake of their family. And they’re not the first celebrity couple to stay close after a split.

Although Gwyneth Paltrow has remarried, her Instagram posts show she still hangs out with her rock star ex, Chris Martin, while actress Elizabeth Hurley calls ex-boyfriend Hugh Grant her “oldest friend” and has a great relationship with his new wife, Anna Eberstein.

We’ve all seen how complicated breakups can be. Mutual friends have to pick sides, children have to see their parents at separate holiday celebrations, and some couples can’t be in the same room without fighting. So is it possible to stay friends with your ex after divorce? The answer is yes, but it’s not always easy.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, our divorce rate has remained steady with 1.9 divorces per 1000 people and 49,510 divorces granted in 2020. Romantic love ends for a variety of reasons, but according to Elisabeth



Shaw, CEO of Relationships Australia, there’s a growing trend to stay friends following a split, especially if you have kids. “Once it might have been assumed that divorce meant no significant relationship was going to be possible,” she says. “But all you once loved about each other, and the significance of the past connection, doesn’t have to be lost. Staying friends is the best outcome, with research supporting the long-term benefits to children of being amicable.”

How to stay friends

ELISABETH Shaw (pictured) says if you want to be friends, that should guide every decision you make from the point of deciding to separate.

“How you navigate telling the children, telling friends, being loyal to each other, having each others’ backs even as you move to different ways of living, how you help each other be successful and settled, and so on, all set the scene for a friendship.

“Staying focused on the children if you have them, and respecting that you both love and want them will also stop you standing in the way of the other, which will only harm the children,” she says.

Relationships coach Sallyanne Hartnell recommends setting boundaries.

“A friendship and an intimate partner relationship are different,” she explains. “What you would say to or share with your partner, you might never disclose to a friend. Decide what is, and is not, okay for this new relationship, and steer clear of anything intimate or personal, unless it’s something that directly affects you or your kids and even then, tread lightly. And agree to a ‘code of silence’ around triggering topics, allowing the past to remain in the past. You’re not forgetting anything hurtful, rather you’re actively choosing to deal with it yourself.”

For help, visit: reflectcoaching.com.au or relationships.org.au

Shaw says a major stumbling block can be the reason for parting. “If there has been trauma and betrayal, then friendship may not be possible, at least to start with,” she says. “In time that can be earned back, but there are other ways to have an effective separation which include politeness, respectful distance and not undermining each other – valuable and worthy goals too.”

Sallyanne Hartnell is a relationship coach, separation and divorce strategist, and the founder

of Reflect Coaching. The 51-year-old from Melbourne is divorced with two children – Elliott, 17, and Eva, 19 – but she still has close ties with her ex.

“For me, the decision to stay friends was conscious in that I wanted to be able to stand next to him at significant moments in the lives of our children, and to be there together at those moments,” she explains. Hartnell’s ex, 54 year old financial executive, Michael Corcoran, says it was important to him that his kids felt safe and had minimal disruption transitioning into a divorced household.

“I recognised that just because Sallyanne didn’t want to remain married to me, it didn’t mean that I was a bad guy nor was she a terrible woman,” he says.

“We both agreed that the kids came first, so given that Sallyanne was the mother of my children and their welfare was sacrosanct, it was important to me that Sallyanne was also okay.”

The pair faced plenty of challenges, from Hartnell having to let go of the dream life they’d planned, to Michael ensuring that joint decision making was approached without emotions getting in the way.

“It can help to look at your ex as a new person,” Hartnell says.

“Imagine your co-parenting relationship is a brand new friendship. Start from there, rather than dragging all of your intimate relationship history into your co-parenting.”

BEHIND THE SCENES



WITH JONATHON MORAN

ROB MILLS

The *Dancing With The Stars* contestant reveals how his paperboy job helped his love of music ...

Have you ever dieted?

I haven’t dieted, but I have given up the booze for months on end. That has had a profound impact on my life. Understanding my relationship with alcohol has helped me lose weight, regulate my moods, and been a game changer for my mental health.

What three things would be at the top of your bucket list if you have one?

I have the Camino walk, Machu Picchu and the Great Pyramid.

If you were prime minister for a day, what would be the first and last things you would do and why?

Well, it wouldn’t be pray. Set up an ICAC to clean out the corruption and self-interest sycophants from parliament. Pay teachers and nurses more.

Most relatable Disney character?

Dory, I am very forgetful.

Favourite book?

At the moment it is *Facts and Other Lies* by Ed Coper. I think it should be compulsory reading, so we know what we’re up against.

What’s your biggest health mistake?

Hot chips.

Favourite music artist and why?

Ben Abraham. I met this kid when we did *Idol* together in 2003. He is one of the country’s best singer-songwriters. An incredible talent and I can’t wait for the world to hear his new soul-bearing album.

What was your first casual job?

Paperboy. Oh how I hated that early alarm going off! But I did love earning money so I could buy CD singles and listen to my favourite music.

When was the last time you cried?

I went for a run the other day, and a song came on, *The Deepest Sighs*, *The Frankest Shadows* by Gang of Youths. It always reminds me of a friend who passed away a few years ago, and the sadness that lingers for friends and family. The rain came down just as the drums kicked in, goosebumps rose up and I started sprinting and the tears got lost across my face. I always feel better after a cry. Like letting off a pressure valve.

If you weren’t doing what you are, what career would you have?

I think I’d be a teacher. I love working with kids and finding ways to empower them through performance workshops.

Dancing with the Stars is screening on Sunday nights on Channel 7.



Picture: Eugene Hyland