

How to stay friends with your best mates

By Lisa Haynes

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Kerry's recent marriage to new hubby Mark Croft has come under scrutiny from both her friends and family - with Jordan branding him a bully.

Jordan, real name Katie Price, said: I don't like Mark and that's the truth. Kerry's too fragile, she should never have married him.

And Kerry has hit back with her right of reply in a magazine column:

Katie has completely taken it out of context and has gone way too far in her retaliation, she fumed.

Friendships of the celebrity variety can be fickle, but when it comes to true friends, life events can take their toll on our relationships with mates, too.

The biggest strains on friendships are when one friend gets married, divorces or is widowed, according to new research by the University of Manchester.

Getting pregnant or having a child is another prime cause of ruptured friendships.

Where would be without our pals? Solo shopping trips, a pint for one down the pub and a phone that rarely rings ... it would be a lonely old life!

Friends are crucial to our enjoyment in life, explains Fiona

Harrold, the Lurgan-born life coach and author of *The 7 Rules Of Success*.

Husbands and wives may come and go but friends will always be there.

We need friends for a life of balance and fulfilment, especially in the UK where we're all such raging workaholics!

We may have a phonebook full of best friends, social buddies and fleeting

acquaintances but there's one sure-fire way to identify a true friend from a foe, according to Harrold.

At any one time, you will have less true friends than you might think, maybe five to 10, she estimates.

The sign of a true friend is someone who wants you to do well. That cliché, 'you know who your friends are when the chips are down' - it's not true at all.

You realise who your friends are when you are on the way up and succeeding. It's the people who are generally thrilled for you and encourage you to keep going and make the best of yourself - those are the friends you want to be hanging out with.

Buddy breakdown

A loyal and true friend is hard to find, but we can often let them slip through our fingers when life throws up a few challenges.

Harrold says: We can outgrow friends when we change as a person and unless the other friend changes in the same way, we can feel out of step with them. The second reason for drifting apart is life events.

Psychiatrist and relationship expert at parship.co.uk, Dr Victoria Lukats, agrees.

It's great to have lifelong friends but things don't always work out that way, she says.

Your values and lifestyle change as you get older and often friends can end up going in two opposite directions as time goes by.

Lukats reveals how the three big triggers identified by the research can potentially turn your friendship upside down:

Marriage

If one friend is single and wants to party every other night and the other is in a committed and stable relationship, their interests can

naturally change. The married friend will want to spend regular quality time with their partner, as well as with his or her friends and family, Lukats explains.

Solution: Marriage doesn't have to mean the end of any pre-existing friendships but there has to be some flexibility and compromise on the parts of both friends if your friendship is going to stand the test of time.

Divorce

Very few people would consciously drop a good friend who was going through a divorce but there can be pressures that aren't initially apparent, Lukats says.

The friend involved can be hugely traumatised - and late night phone calls and a friend in tears on a regular basis can be too much for some friends to deal with. Another issue can be that the divorced friend could have been seen very much as one half of a couple. Some friends may also feel their loyalties are being torn.

Solution: Anyone who has been through a traumatic break-up and wants to maintain a friendship with a couple should be careful not to bad-mouth their ex, no matter how badly they feel they've been treated.

Widowed

As with a divorce or a relationship break-up, a person's newly single status can make some friends feel daunted or threatened in some way, Lukats warns.

Some friends rally round for a bereaved friend but others may feel awkward as if they don't quite know what to say. The bereaved friend can also draw away from some friends and may not feel like socialising at all, especially if they are suffering from depression.

Solution: Unless there's an effort on both parts, a friendship can end up petering out following a bereavement, even if it's not intentional.

Firm friendships

Don't let your much-loved mates slip off into obscurity, whatever is happening in your life. Harrold has these tips to keep friendships alive:

A friendship, like a relationship, needs time. Put aside time for friends that matter to you to spend time together, talk and connect. It won't happen automatically.

Be more sociable. Is your favourite TV programme really worth forsaking a night out with a friend for? Take the initiative and put together a little gathering. It could be a drinks gathering, Saturday day out together or even plan a weekend away for the future.

Be tolerant. Friends don't have to think exactly the same way as you on everything. It would be pretty boring if we all had friends who were exactly the same. Encourage yourself to be open and accept different views.

Don't hold grudges if you have argued with a good friend. Any forgiveness begins in your head. Deciding to forgive someone is crucial because it lets go of all the tension and resentment. What you're saying is 'what happened, happened' but you're choosing to let it go and move on.

For more information on life coach Fiona Harrold, visit

www.fionaharrold.com

For more information on psychiatrist Dr Victoria Lukats visit

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