



Can you really be FRIENDS with your EX?

He's probably the last person you want to see after a painful break-up. But some couples do manage to salvage a friendship, as these women reveal...

Dawn French and Lenny Henry, Jude Law and Sadie Frost, and Demi Moore and Bruce Willis are all perfect examples of couples who have gone through separations but found a way to become friends again.

As Dawn, recently divorced from Lenny after 25 years of marriage, tells us: 'Do I miss him? No, because I see him all the time. He's my friend now. You learn to be divorced people.'

Jude Law and ex-wife Sadie Frost still holiday together with their three

children, with Jude explaining: 'We're still friends, whatever has happened between us. The main thing is to make sure the children feel secure and loved.'

Meanwhile, former couple Demi Moore and Bruce Willis, married for 11 years, are happily divorced. They're often pictured together, along with Demi's toyboy husband Ashton Kutcher.

'It wasn't a piece of cake,' Demi has admitted. 'It took diligence and effort and even enduring awkwardness.'

Bruce says: 'It took time for people to wrap their minds around the fact I could be friends with my ex-wife's husband.'

'I sometimes sleep in his bed!'

Lesley Barnes, 43, is a graphic design consultant from Witham, Essex. She and her ex-husband Colin, a cab driver, have been friends since schooldays.

When Colin and I married in Las Vegas in 2003, it was one of the happiest days of my life. We'd been childhood friends but it was as if being married changed our relationship and almost straight after our wedding day we began to argue. I think we both felt under pressure to make it work but no matter how hard we tried, it just didn't.

We were both sad when we divorced after just two years but our friendship had lasted a lifetime and we weren't prepared for that to end too. I stayed in our marital home while Colin moved to

'We still like having dinner together'

Amanda Bouch, 55, a business consultant, lives in Maidenhead. She and her partner, Keith, an accountant, split up after living together for 10 years.

Keith and I got on well, but over time we became more like friends than lovers and simply drifted apart. It was a painful decision but we split, sold the home we'd shared and bought separate properties just 15 minutes apart.

Neither of us wanted to completely lose touch so at first we sent each other the odd text or made an occasional call to say 'hello'.

But it was our German Shepherd, Diva, who really gave us a reason to stay in touch. I travel a lot for work but Keith has more predictable working hours, so we decided that it was best if he looked after her. I missed her terribly, though, so I started popping over to take her home with me at weekends.

At first it was awkward when Keith and I met. But I knew it would take time and had a vision

of us becoming close, supportive friends. And that's what we've become. Staying friends was important to me because I valued what we had and as far as I could tell, Keith felt the same way too.

As the weeks and months passed, collecting Diva became less awkward, and less about the dog, and more about Keith and me. Picking her up took longer each time as we stopped to chat. At first our conversations felt quite stilted

'After being so intimate it felt strange kissing him on the cheek'

as we tried to figure out how to relate to each other again. And after years of being very intimate, it felt strange just giving him a hug or kiss on the cheek goodbye. Only with time were we eventually able to let our guard down.

One evening, I ended up staying for something to eat. By this stage we were more comfortable with each other and I no longer felt like I had to think about what to say. Keith cooked while I chatted to him and played with Diva.

Now we often have dinner together (either at mine or his) when we're handing over Diva.

a house just 10 minutes away. As we'd grown up together, it felt natural to continue our friendship. He's a cab driver so would often pick me up from my office if I was working late, or call to ask if I wanted any shopping picking up on his way home. We'd also started to regularly meet for breakfast on Saturdays at my place.

In March I moved to Essex, an hour and a half away, to be nearer work. Some people might say not living so close is healthier for a divorced couple but we've never felt in each other's pockets. And now if I work late and need to be back in my London office early, I'll stay the night at Colin's. He sleeps on the sofa and I get his bed.

We no longer share any romantic feelings for each other, probably because,

first and foremost, we are friends and that's always been the strongest part of our relationship.

We also look after each other's cats when we're away, which helps us stay in touch, and Colin's still really good friends with one of my brothers and my niece.

We keep working at our friendship and respect each other's privacy completely. Although I have spoken to Colin's girlfriend on the phone to discuss looking after the cats, we've never met. I know she finds our relationship hard to understand and I can see her point of view so I try to reassure her that I'm just a friend. Some people may think Colin and I are crazy for staying as close as we are, but it works for us.



Lesley is still close to her ex



Amanda and her ex rely on each other

We've also started playing golf together again. We did it as a couple and I'd really missed it.

Even though we're still not spontaneous about touching, our friendship just gets stronger. If I need help I know Keith is only a phone call away. Our relationship as lovers didn't work, but knowing we've still got each other when we need a friend is a real comfort.

FRIENDS, BUT NOT LOVERS

Gladeana McMahon, a counsellor and psychotherapist, says:

*** Don't expect instant friendship.** If your break up didn't involve anyone else it may be easier to move straight into a friendship, but every couple is different. You might need to give your ex some time.

*** Mean it.** If you are the one to end the relationship, don't offer friendship out of guilt or dependency.

*** Be sensitive.** Remember that some people find it hard to accept that ex-couples stay friends - especially a new partner.

*** Put the kids first.** If you have children, put your differences to one side to show that a relationship breakdown does not mean the end of communication. And avoid forcing your children to have divided loyalties.



Cheryl Cole and Ashley: just good friends or back together again?