

Parenting

# Should I tell children truth behind marriage break-up?

**Q** MY WIFE has left me after 12 years of marriage. She told our two children the love went out of our marriage years ago and we agreed we would be better off living apart. In fact, our marriage was very close and loving until shortly before she left, when she became infatuated with another man. Even then I was desperate for us to stay together. What should I tell the children when they ask me? Do I go along with her fiction or maintain the truth as I saw it?



Anne Atkins

them in two. One day they will probably work out what happened for themselves or she will tell them. You can answer their questions as best you can then.

However, I believe you can tell them the truth as you see it. What your wife has told them is not necessarily fiction. You would not be the first man to have what seemed to you a happy and loving marriage, while your wife might have thought the relationship had been dead for years. I'm not saying this is what happened, just that it is possible.

You can tell your children that what their mother has told them is different from your experience. Be honest and let them know how much you have loved her and how much you love her now, if that is true. It might make them more regretful the marriage broke up but a healthy sorrow will help them mature and enable them to understand and love you both more. I've never heard of children being harmed by knowing how much their mother was loved.

Separated parents must be careful to put their children's welfare above every other consideration. That usually means defending the other parent, however much it hurts. Your children desperately want to love both of you and if you undermine your ex-wife, you will tear

expressyourself Forum

**M**Y STOMACH somersaults as the plane roars along the runway and swoops into the sky. I'm not afraid of flying. Instead, my mind is filled with the thoughts of trying new foods, seeing the sights and leaving the laundry and washing up far behind.

I love getting away from it all but my friends assume I hate holidays because I refuse to travel with them.

It's one thing getting together for a meal or shopping but holidays are different. I've learnt from bitter experience that taking a trip with friends is the perfect way to discover you have much less in common than you thought. You might be able to agree on where to go and for how long; the trouble is deciding what to do once you're there.

"I took a weekend break with a friend once and all he wanted to do was drink beer and sit around," my friend Hazel recalls. "I thought, never again."

The last time I went on holiday with other people, we spent a week in Ireland. Like me, my companions wanted to relax and see the sights. I was confident they weren't about to reveal a passion for bungee-jumping or photographing numberplates. But a pre-holiday chat about favourite leisure activities often isn't enough to ensure a mutually enjoyable trip. You also need to agree on what those pastimes actually involve.

I thought a walk was an easy stroll across horizontal ground. I had no idea it could mean scrambling up a mountain and clinging on for dear life.

During that Ireland trip we were staying at a hostel beside the 12 Bens mountains in Connemara. With a backdrop of beautiful lakes and peaks to absorb, I jumped at the idea of taking a walk.

Lost in conversation

# So glad you are not here

ANNE WOLLENBERG adores her friends and family but when it comes to travelling, she would rather go solo

about the gorgeous scenery. I was happy to follow my friends rather than lead the way.

I'm still not quite sure how it happened but after an easy stroll over some foothills, we were suddenly walking upwards. I made the mistake of gritting my teeth and going with the flow.

That's how I came to be halfway up a mountain in trainers with no grip on the soles. While my foolhardy friends made their way to the top, exclaiming how lucky they were to have this amazing opportunity, I lost my nerve halfway up and phoned my then-boyfriend in tears.

"What's wrong?" he asked, baffled, after establishing there hadn't been a death or a serious injury. "My bag's covered in mud!" I wailed.

But really I was upset because I had paid to go on holiday and I wasn't having a good time.

He calmed me down enough to convince me that I should try to enjoy the descent. I managed to smile and give it my best shot, until I fell over.

When I think of that holiday now, the memory that stands out most is the experience of carrying a coat reeking of sheep dung through Dublin airport.

That was the last time I went on holiday with anyone else. I thought I was just a miseryguts

but my friend Louise feels exactly the same. "I've been holidaying alone on and off since I left home at 16. I find traditional holidays really dull," she says.

"I'm often at odds with partners, too," she admits. "My ex-husband was really into caravanning, which is my idea of hell. He even wanted us to go caravanning on our honeymoon. I put my foot down and insisted on a hotel."

**B**UT wanting to go away by yourself isn't just about avoiding activities you don't enjoy, it's also a great opportunity to experience the places you visit.

"Holidaying alone is more interesting because if you want company you have to seek it out," says Louise. "I have met some wonderful locals over the years who have invited me into their homes to eat or have shown me around their village. I'm certain it would never have happened if I'd been with a partner or gang of friends."

A couple of weeks ago I came close to breaking my resolution to take solo holidays. A friend told me she was dying to visit Prague and my mouth answered without consulting my brain. "I've always wanted to go there!" I said before I'd thought it through. I was willing to give it a try, until she sent me an e-mail the next morning.

"I think we should take the earliest scheduled flight so we can have as much time as possible," she wrote, despite knowing I can barely string a sentence together before 9am. "It's at half past six. Shall we book this week?"

I knew it was a warning sign and I had to tell her I couldn't go.

I'm still planning to go away this year but I don't think I'm going to tell my friends or family when or where. That way there's no danger of anyone else wanting to come along.

**STRESS-FREE:** Holidaying alone can be easier

Picture: GETTY IMAGES

expressyourself Fashion



Picture: GETTY IMAGES

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**Yellow bow bangle watch, £75, Betsey Johnson (01215 258577)**

**Diamanté lips bangle, £68, Butler and Wilson (020 7409 2955)**

**Red and gold bangle, £15, Miss Madame (020 8993 7137)**

**Pink dome ring, £56, Noir at Kabiri (020 7224 1808)**

**Pear watch necklace, £115, Marc by Marc Jacobs (0870 224 6633)**

**Silver deer head necklace, £210, Butterfly (www.butterfly-jewellery.com)**

**Green and gold bamboo earrings, £48, Noir at Kabiri (020 7224 1808)**

**Cream enamel flower ring, £16, Johnny Loves Rosie (020 7247 1496)**

**Blue and purple bird necklace, £12, Red Herring at Debenhams (0844 561 6161)**

**Multicolour star necklace, £25, Punky Pins (www.punky-pins.co.uk)**

**Blue diamante heart ring, £3, Peacocks (0292 027 0222)**

**Red rose earrings, £2, Tammy at Bhs (0845 196 0000)**

**Red enamel rocket necklace, £149, Thomas Sabo (020 7824 1810)**

**Crown chain watch, £325, Juicy Couture (01428 664700)**

**Orange enamel and silver ring, £68, Folli Follie (020 7287 9912)**

**Enamel tiger bracelet, £55, Kenneth J Lane at Fenwick (020 7629 9161)**

**Red diamanté shoe earrings, £5, Freedom at Topshop, (01277 844476)**

EYE-CATCHING: Sarah Jessica Parker sports an assortment of chains

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