

## THE SINGLES FILES

efforts with my son. I had only dated Harry for two months when he met Jack.

Wow - what a disaster. Because I felt certain of Harry, I let my barriers down. We didn't date so much as spend all our time together as a freshly made family. Jack's struggle to use a knife and fork neatly really irritated Harry: in my opinion he had a totally unrealistic view of what 'a well-mannered child' was. I wasn't prepared to force Jack to change to please someone who might not stick around.

Harry wanted to backtrack and so we tried to 'date', but that didn't work because I needed to be a mum, too. On one such night Jack fell and hurt his leg. I cut short the date and went to him. Harry said this indicated things to come, if we had children. And so we broke up. I did wonder if it had everything to do with me being a single mum.

I am not weary of dating, but am becoming more cautious. I'm trying to find the 'right' way of dating as a single mother. I suspect there isn't one. I have dated many different types of men, but never a single or co-parenting father. Perhaps I should.

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### HELEN CROYDON 32

*'I have never pretended to offer commitment'*

I find it frustrating when friends assume that because I date I must be desperately searching for a soul mate. When I divulge that I am only interested in casual dating they think that means drunk, baseless sex with a stranger. There is a huge area between those two

extremes that is overlooked, and which I have found rewarding, enjoyable and far less complicated than what some of my single female peers put themselves through.

After coming out of a two-and-a-half-year relationship, I have been happily single for three years. I am not at all interested in casual sex with someone I have just met, but neither do I want to invest in a full-time relationship where I feel obliged to meet his family, learn his friends' names and plan every weekend together. I have found several dating companions, either through friends, colleagues, evenings out or internet dating. We will typically meet three to four times a month and consider ourselves free to date other people at the same time. I call it a low-maintenance relationship. It is based on genuine chemistry and physical attraction, but we do not have the dreaded, unspoken question looming over us as to where the relationship is heading.

The key to any relationship is honesty, whether it is a friendship, a fling or a serious relationship. I have never pretended to offer a high level of commitment. Yet I know men and women who see no longevity in a new relationship, but continue to give the impression that they do, simply to keep the other person's affections alive.

I acknowledge, though, that because I am not prepared to invest a great deal of time in a relationship, I cannot expect a lot back. I definitely cannot call on any of my low-maintenance dates to deal with a DIY emergency, for instance, nor expect them to be an on-demand shoulder



I cannot call on my low-maintenance dates to deal with a DIY emergency, nor expect them to be an on-demand shoulder to cry on

to cry on. But that doesn't mean I can't enjoy the things they can offer - stimulating conversation, fun and a level of friendship. As long as neither of us deludes ourselves that our relationship is more than what it is, we have an honest and respectful union.

I spoke to a girl friend recently who was putting herself through mental torture, weighing up the positive and negative characteristics of a guy she had seen four times. If she enjoys his company she should continue to see him, but she should not have her

heart set on moulding him into husband material. I have never felt a strong urge to start a family, which may be why a less involved style of dating suits me. But I think even people seeking a long-term relationship can benefit from my approach.

I do not suggest that every singleton should give up looking for a secure, trusting relationship and take up casual dating. But I do think the dating scene should be open to other options outside the conventional model. It is very difficult to find someone who can wear all the hats of passionate lover, trusted confidant, pillar of support, life coach and domestic helper. High expectations will only lead to anguish. Dating is far more rewarding if we define the role we want a partner to play. ●