

lifestyle **ADVICE**

■ Nina **FARR**

WHEN I became a single mother back in 2012, there are a few things I think I would have liked to know.

If you're raising your family alone, or you know a mum who is, I'd like to share my top five things I wish our friends, supporters, and even single mums themselves knew.

Being a single mother is not unusual any more

I was the first of my friends to get married, and the first to get divorced too. I didn't set out to do either of these things — it's just the way the chips fell for me. One of those things felt cool and exciting and romantic. The other one sucked.

Becoming a single mother six months before I turned thirty with a newborn and a toddler on my hip, well, it felt pretty dire. I didn't fall into a natural peer group of powerful single parents just waiting to hang out with me. To start with, it all did feel pretty lonely.

I wish I knew then that I'd joined the ranks of nearly 220,000 single parent families in Ireland, a quarter of all families with dependent children, with eight out of 10 of those families headed up by a woman just like me.

Women who could do without the moniker 'broken' stuck before the 'family' each of them is busting a gut to raise.

Being a single mother would stick a rocket under my butt and power me to professional success

If I'd believed the stories about single mothers, I might have written myself off

KEEPING MUM: Life can be better as a single parent



Don't believe the single mother myths

Parenting alone

mothers, I might have written myself off professionally. It's true, childcare can be a nightmare, I don't have the luxury of a second pair of hands or second set of parental leave days to cover the usual winter bouts of vomiting bugs.

In fact, I'm holed up right now with a five-year-old who impressively decorated my walls last night with just such a bug. But I'm self-employed today, having morphed from a dedicated employee into a driven businesswoman almost overnight, now that I'm the sole provider for my brood.

I've unlocked skills and tenacity I had no idea I possessed. I just published a book, wrote a course that's being researched by a university and run a coaching business that regularly gets five star reviews from my clients. Plus, I built it all around the hours and needs of my family. Today, it's a career I'm proud of that works better for my children and me than the 9-5 I left behind.

Lone parenting isn't lonely

If I was scared of anything when I set out to raise two baby boys on my own it was that I was going to be lonely along the way. Nothing could be further from the truth today. After a rocky start I decided to build a network of cheerleaders around me and my kids.

Today, those same people carry us through just about anything. I've shared Christmas Day with another single mother and her son, holidayed with numerous friends, moved house five times (!) with the help and camaraderie of other diverse families just like mine. My kids have a huge network of friends both at school and out of it, many of whom have parents, step parents, siblings, step siblings, half siblings... just like mine.

Dating (and sex) would be SO MUCH BETTER

Who knew that dating after divorce would

STRONG:
Author
Nina Farr
and (far
right) her
book



be better than before?

As a slightly neurotic twenty-something with a whole lot of hang-ups and insecurities I made my way through the dating scene with a permanent sense of mild anxiety.

I did not appreciate my strong and healthy young body, or my freedom to choose almost any kind of life with a future partner.

As a thirty something mother of two, with a slightly rickety post baby body still recovering from pelvic pain that left me on crutches for months after both my pregnancies, and literally no flexibility in my schedule whatsoever (you may date me on Saturday, every other weekend, and at no other point unless you give me two weeks notice and bung a tenner in for the babysitter...) I

actually discovered something sexy as

hell. I had boundaries. Boundaries helped me weed out the nutters and the time wasters pronto.

The guys who stuck around were awesome, emotionally mature men, single fathers

themselves, or genuinely up for the challenge of dating a woman with children.

A woman who didn't want a husband, didn't want a baby, and didn't want a man with money because she was hell bent on building her own empire. A woman who liked her body and her life just as it is today — with fun as her main agenda. When I got in touch with my sense of fun, self-respect and boundaries, I met my partner and the rest as they say, is history.

My kids would be happier, and so would their Dad and I

There are moments in the middle of a divorce when you feel like the conflict will never end. You honestly look at your kids and panic that you broke the family that was meant to raise them to adulthood, and now they will never be ok again. You wonder if you will ever be ok again. The person you once loved enough to marry and create children with in the first place feels like a stranger, or worse, an enemy.

If I ever felt like my family was broken, it was in those early days. I wish I had been able to see into the future. Just five years along, my

kids were thriving. My ex and I were even sharing the odd joke on WhatsApp, and today, that's developed into honest to goodness chats about what our kids need from us both. It's

taken a lot of hard graft and a willingness to do the work on myself, first and foremost, to get here. I'm not saying that the journey from breakup to new beginnings hasn't been difficult.

But I know now that getting divorced didn't break my family. Hand on heart, it jump started my own journey to becoming the kind of mother I always hoped I would be. So these days, I challenge it every time I hear someone talk about 'broken families'. In my experience, a breakup is often the start of something beautiful. If you're not there yet, hang in there. And don't believe the hype. Your family is no more broken than mine was. It's just in a chrysalis stage. Something beautiful will soon be emerging.

Nina Farr is a Leadership and Parenting Coach who works with parents who are raising their families alone. She is a TEDx speaker and author of *I Am The Parent Who Stayed* – Joyfully Parenting Alone now available on Amazon. See ninafarr.com

