

## Kirsty Young

# 'There is a lot to celebrate about being a grown-up'

Experience is valuable – and who better to pass on their life lessons than GH's favourite women? In a rare interview, the presenter talks about family, friendship and finding time to do absolutely nothing at all

**L**isten to your body. When I was 25, I thought I was indestructible – then I contracted meningitis. I was chronically unwell, but I had listened to a doctor who told me to take a couple of headache pills and lie down. If I'd listened to my body, I would have known something was really badly wrong. That experience taught me to start taking care of my body, and that it's not a sign of weakness to take a rest. I get pretty anxious and worn down if I don't sleep well and take time out. My mum calls it 'staring at the wall and dribbling' time, and sometimes, that's just what you need.

**You cannot be a perfect parent.** I started out thinking I was going to make a brilliant job of it, but I've realised that, in the same way that I'm fallible in other areas of my life, I'm fallible as a parent, too – and that is fine. You just need to be a good-enough parent, so that when your kids need you, you're there for them. I try to take a little step back and let things take their course.

### Trust your true friends.

Presenting Desert Island Discs for the past eight years has been a crash course in humanity. This year, I interviewed Daniel Kahneman, a Nobel Prize-winning scientist. He's a very wise man who has done a lot of research into human behaviour. He said that when you have a problem, whatever it is, you should listen to your true friends – because they are totally invested in your life and have your best interests at heart, and they also have the clarity of thought that distance brings. It's so simple, yet there are times when we don't want to burden people

### For the record

Kirsty began her career at 20, working as a radio continuity announcer

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She and her husband, businessman Nick Jones, have two daughters, and she is stepmother to Nick's two children

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She is patron of the Meningitis Research Foundation ([meningitis.org](http://meningitis.org)), which provides information and support for those affected by the illness

who are close to us, or expose ourselves, or seem incapable. But actually putting it out there with someone you trust implicitly makes complete sense.

**Remember to be kind to the person you love.** My husband and I celebrate our 15th wedding anniversary this year. He has taught me that love should manifest itself practically in kindness, as this is a really pure, useful, decent expression of love.

**Be gentle with yourself about ageing.** I'm 45 now, and frankly it's not always easy to deal with the fact that the wrinkles are coming, the backside is spreading... It takes a bit of accommodating. I've taken up regular exercise, which is a big thing for me. If I'm lucky, I'll have the same amount of life to live as I've just had, so it's about embracing it. When I celebrate a birthday, I don't get hung up on my age, because the alternative is being deep in the ground. So every time I see a new wrinkle I try to think, at least I'm lucky enough to have one. There is a lot to celebrate in being a grown-up lady – it's a really interesting place to be, and I feel more myself than I've ever felt in my life.

### Being a stepmum has been the biggest surprise of all.

When I met my stepchildren, I naively thought that love would conquer all, and that I instinctively knew how best to be a stepmum. Well, it was much more complicated than that. But it has taught me more about what love and family mean than I can usefully put into words, and it has been hugely rewarding.

### I never thought I'd hear myself say I'm obsessed with gardening,

but I am. There is beauty in the way that time is marked in a garden. You can plant something and think: in seven years' time, that'll look great. And watching things grow seems to slow down time. There is something about that that I find consoling and nourishing. □

