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Why ‘bro hubs’ are becoming the new modern family — they put children first

Celebs like Lenny Kravitz and Jason Momoa make it look easy, but it takes a lot of work and commitment for biological fathers and stepfathers to co-parent kids together.

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Josh Budd, right, has become friends with his ex-wife's new husband, Martin Ware, as they co-parent Budd's children.

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By Shawna Cohen Special to the Star

It was the post that went down in divorce history.

“Ride or die. Brothers for life,” Lenny Kravitz wrote earlier this year on Instagram, alongside a photo of him and “Aquaman” star Jason Momoa sitting atop their motorcycles. What makes the post noteworthy is that Momoa had recently split from actor-wife Lisa Bonet, to whom Kravitz was married from 1987 to 1993. The pair share daughter, and actor, Zoë Kravitz, who commented, “Well isn’t this just adorable. Love you both so much.”

Lenny Kravitz reiterated the sentiment in August with a birthday tribute to Momoa, raising his let-love-rule status to a whole new level. The men clearly formed a connection, with Momoa having played a role in Zoë’s life since her teenage years.

In many ways, they elevated their so-called bromance to “bro hubs” territory. We often think of biological fathers and stepfathers being at odds with one another. But bro hubs are all about supporting each other for the greater good: the children.

Somewhere along the way, a genuine friendship forms and redefines what it means to be a family.

For the tens of thousands of Canadian couples who split up each year — the most recent divorce rate was 5.6 per 1,000 married people in 2020, according to [Statistics Canada](#) — the breakup process when children are involved entails navigating the complex road of co-parenting. Add a new spouse and things get even trickier. However, it's a common setup for a significant portion of Canadians.

Recent figures show that 12 per cent of couples with children are considered [stepfamilies](#), meaning their family includes at least one child from a previous marriage. It's not surprising, then, that we're seeing new types of relationships form from circumstance.

Celebrities like Kravitz and Momoa are shining a light on such friendships and, not surprisingly, they make it look effortless. Ditto Gwyneth Paltrow and Chris Martin, who famously “consciously uncoupled” in 2014; years later, Paltrow and current husband Brad Falchuk were spotted vacationing in the Hamptons with Martin and partner Dakota Johnson.

In reality, though, attaining bro-hub status is less about photo ops and more about a commitment to doing what's best for the children — and ultimately, the grown-ups, too.

Toronto therapist and mediator [Deborah Mecklinger](#) has been coaching people through divorce for more than three decades. These days, she's selective about clients, opting only for those dedicated to a respectful separation process.

“It takes an immense amount of effort, work and commitment,” Mecklinger said. “It's a mindful, intentional approach. It's choosing to lead with kindness and asking yourself, ‘Where do I want to land?’”

While there are no hard figures supporting the rise of bro hubs, Mecklinger said she is certainly witnessing notable friendship, caring and support among biological dads and stepdads. One reason is that they're more involved than ever in day-to-day parenting; it's no longer just moms and stepmoms in the trenches.

“Men have a stake in this, too. They're at extracurricular activities, they're driving carpool. They help each other out and truly recognize the role the other person plays.”

Josh Budd, 41, is a hands-on dad who had his kids top of mind when he and his wife, Ali Budd, separated in 2017. “It was a conscious decision to put the children first and do whatever it took to keep that priority in place,” said Josh.

His own parents divorced when he was a toddler and Josh said they haven't felt comfortable being in the same room together since. He wanted things to be different for his children, aged 10 and eight. To that end, he and his ex — along with their current spouses — have created a co-parenting scenario worthy of a Hallmark movie.

For starters, the couples live on the same street in midtown Toronto. The kids split their time between the two homes and attend school right in the middle. They bubbled together during the early days of COVID-19. They celebrate the kids' birthdays and milestones together. Last month, Josh and his wife, Erin Banting, hosted an intimate Christmas dinner with a guest list that included Josh's ex, her husband, Martin Ware, and Ali's mother, with whom Josh remains close.

Josh inadvertently pulled his own Kravitz-like rock star move in June by wishing Ware a happy first Father's Day on Instagram. "Thankful for my modern family today, and every day," reads the caption alongside a photo of the two couples and three children, including Ali's and Ware's two-year-old daughter. It's a simple gesture but speaks volumes about the men's unique bond.

"Parenting is hard, especially with multiple children. Having more minds and hands and hearts in prioritizing your children's best interest is a real blessing," said Josh. "Knowing that they have another strong and positive role model ... Martin's a good example of what I would want my kids to see in a man. I've very thankful that he's chosen to be a part of our lives."

The men have a lot in common — a love of fitness, sports, a good glass of wine — but it's their collective approach to discipline, as well as a desire to put the kids first, that unites them. The result is a new type of modern family in which the lines of communication are always open, and the kids feel happy and secure. Josh said the relationship is a point of pride for his children.

It hasn't always been easy, but Josh attributes such a positive setup to hard work and dedication rather than luck. "It's about constantly checking yourself to ensure you're making decisions for the right reasons. In the end, we made this environment, we didn't inherit it."

Mecklinger said couples who strive for an amicable split require a clear intention, as well as tools and strategies. "It's not easy, but it beats the alternative. It's a lot more work to be in a toxic relationship, yet people don't think about it that way," she said.

"My clients are having multi-family vacations or family photos done together. They're cheering the kids on at hockey, soccer, dance competitions. They're at parent-teacher interviews together or sitting at a hospital bedside together."

As she sees it, the proverbial village can never be too big. Case in point: Mare said that when he and Ali put their two-year-old to bed one night recently — the "big kids" were at Josh and Banting's — their little girl started singing about all the people who love her. "Daddy loves me," she squealed. "Mommy loves me. Nana loves me ... Uncle Josh loves me!"

While most men have to put their insecurities aside at some point to achieve bro-hub standing, the results are worth the effort. It brings about new connections, sure, but there are few things better than knowing there's an extra person out there who loves your child unconditionally.

Shawna Cohen has been writing about fashion, travel, design, health, parenting and lifestyle trends for more than two decades. Follow her on Instagram @co.snaps

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