

KIMBERLEY:

'Liam is busy working on his music'

Kimberley Walsh opens up to Closer about best pal Cheryl and Liam Payne – and the former One Direction star's manic schedule

Kimberley Walsh first met Cheryl in 2002, forming as Girls Aloud on TV talent show *Popstars: The Rivals* – and they've remained best friends ever since, recently bonding over their shared experiences as mums.

Last week – after months of reports their romance was on the rocks – Cheryl confirmed she had split from partner Liam Payne, father to their 15-month-old son, Bear.

When *Closer* spoke exclusively to Kimberley, 36, just two days ahead of the shock announcement, there was no hint of the imminent split – though the singer-turned-actress did comment on the former One Directioner's manic tour schedule (which insiders say is one of the reasons for their relationship's demise).

Asked if she and husband Justin Scott, 36, enjoyed double dates with Cheryl and Liam, Kimberley admits, "We obviously all go for dinner and stuff, but we don't get many chances to go out just as couples anyway. It's so hard to get a night off, and Liam's busy working on his music."

BONDING OVER PLAYDATES

She adds, "Liam is such a lovely guy, it's impossible not to like him. He and Justin get on really well, too."

Kimberley has also remained close to ex-bandmate Nicola Roberts, with the trio cosying up in a selfie to celebrate Cheryl's 35th birthday last week, just hours before Cheryl revealed she and Liam had split.

But becoming mums – Kimberley welcomed son Bobby in September 2014 and a second son, Cole, in December 2016 – has given her and Cheryl more excuses to get together, and she says her boys regularly enjoy playdates with Cheryl's baby, Bear.

She says, "I was lucky when I had Bobby, because I had school friends who had kids, and my sister had a baby, but I was the first out of me, Cheryl and Nicola [Roberts]. It's hard when you become a mother, because you can become wrapped up in it – but Cheryl and Nicola were amazing, and made a massive effort."

"My son Cole and Cheryl's Bear are only a few months apart, so we have playdates all the time. Cheryl was destined to be a great mum, and our friendship became even stronger when she had Bear, because we



With husband Justin and kids Cole and Bobby



She and Cheryl are best friends



She says Liam is a "lovely guy"

were both going through the same thing. We grew up together in the band, and now we're watching our boys grow up together."

But asked whether Cheryl would ever consider another baby, Kimberley admits, "I'm not the best advert for two babies! The transition from one to two is quite difficult, because suddenly you have to keep your eyes and ears on two little people. Cheryl and Nicola came over to mine the other day, and it was that crazy few hours of tea-time and then bedtime, with my two going berserk. I thought, 'Oh gosh, I'm going to put her off having more.' I could put anyone off having more!"

BABY NO.3

Kimberley says she's glad her marriage with Justin, 36 – whom she first started dating in 2003, and married in 2016 – has remained largely out of the media spotlight.

She says, "Justin is quite private – he doesn't have any social media accounts. He's not interested in that side of the business. It's nice, because we have our



MY VIEW ON...

FINDING FAME AT 22... "It can be a tough industry, as there's so much judgement. I don't have any regrets, though."

STAYING DOWN-TO-EARTH... "I met my husband Justin soon after *Girls Aloud*, and I still have friends I've known since childhood, so those people keep me grounded and normal."

JUGGLING MOTHERHOOD AND A CAREER... "It's a balance. You can feel pulled in a lot of directions, but I wouldn't change it."

own little thing. We've never had any added pressure from being in the spotlight. "Becoming parents changed our relationship, because obviously it's an adjustment – but it also had such a positive impact on us as a couple. We had a lot of time with it just being the two of us, so it felt right when we started our family."

And, despite having her hands full with her two boys, Kimberley – who's designed her own range of baby clothes, *Kimba Kids* – says she's open to the idea of having more.

She says, "I've got two boys under four, so I'll give myself a break before I consider another baby. But I come from a big family, so I'd never say 'never' to another baby."

GIRLS ALOUD REUNION

Since their split in 2013, there's been speculation that a *Girls Aloud* reunion could be on the cards. And Kimberley hints that, despite rumours of tension and feuding, the five girls might still get back together.

She says, "There are no plans for a reunion right now, but we all get on and there are no major issues with us, despite what some people may think."

"I think if the right opportunity came along, it could happen. It's hard, because there's five of us, so we all have to be ready and free to do it. But if the stars aligned for us, I could see it happening. It was such a fantastic time in all our lives, and we have great memories."

By Katherine Romero

● *Kimba Kids* is available from next.co.uk/shop/brand-kimbakids. Turn to page 4 for the latest on Cheryl and Liam's split.

'Cheryl was destined to be a great mum'