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Should Single Parents Date?



Dating after Divorce: Tips to Keep the Date and the Kids from Hating Each Other

By JOSIE BROWN

By the time Katie was seven, she had matured enough to realize that Rita's dates weren't competing with her for her mother's affections. "When she got to the point where she was actually happy to see me in love, it was great."

Rita also came to recognize that men with experience raising children of their own were more in tune with her daughters' needs. "They would treat her with respect, applauded her maturity, and she appreciated that."

On the other hand, men who had never had kids were invariably less empathetic. "When Katie was eight, one guy I dated invited her to go out with us to dinner — and then he immediately started criticizing her table matters! She didn't say a word, but I could see the tears in her eyes."

That was one of many difficult nights in a series of life lessons for Rita on divorce and dating. She has never regretted, however, the decision she made at the restaurant that night. "We walked out right then and there. I was a parent first and foremost. Whomever I was dating needed to know that."

Myers points out that the new significant others' role is not that as a co-parent to the child. "The biological parent is the one who should be making all the decisions on behalf of the child. As the relationship with the significant other deepens over time, it will evolve from that of empathetic support for the parent, to perhaps that of a mentor for the child. But that won't happen overnight. In fact may take years."

If the new partner is also a parent, says Myers, he or she may want to take on that role in this new relationship — but the child's parent should say thank you, but no thank you. "The new significant other's role in the children's life is that of an adult friend. Yes, of course, he may care about them, but he should not be filling dad's shoes."

Bandera and Myers also agree that the needs of the child should always take precedent over any other relationship. "If there is a [joint custody](#) situation, arrange your one-on-one time with your new significant other on the nights in which your ex has custody," say Myers. "Self balance is very important in everyone's life. If you make the effort to balance your time with your children and this new relationship, you're giving your child a wonderful model which they can follow in their own lives."

INTRODUCING YOUR DATE TO YOUR CHILDREN

For nearly all of us, the desire to share our lives with a loving mate is, eventually, an undeniable need. And while it is difficult making all the pieces of your life fit back together, it can be done. Here's how:

1. Think of the children first.

They are your first consideration, whether you choose to date, or not.

2. Wait to make that introduction.

There is no rush to introduce your dates to your children. In fact, waiting until the relationship is exclusive is better for your children — and therefore better for you, too. When the time is right, choose a neutral locale, and

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Fear is rooted in not knowing, and not understanding. To as great an extent as is age appropriate, tell the children what's going on, and where they stand in the process. They will be much more open to the new person if you allow them to ask questions, and you answer them honestly. They have a right to their opinions, but you have the final decision about the relationship.

4. Balance your time between dating and parenting.

One of children's greatest fears is that they will be forgotten. Because a new relationship may well heighten their fears, the one-on-one time you spend ensures that they are always the first and foremost priority in your life.

Source: shannonmyers.com

Josie Brown's articles have appeared in Redbook, AOL's Women Channel, Yahoo.com's Personals Channel and more. She is also the relationship editor at singlemindedwomen.com, and the editor of John Gray's internationally syndicated question-and-answer columns; and co-author, along with her husband, Martin, of "Marriage Confidential: 102 Honest Answers to the Questions Every Husband Wants to Ask, and Every Wife Needs to Know." She can be reached at josiebrownauthor@gmail.com.

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