



Introducing a New Partner to Your Children

We always advise parents to introduce new partners to children **ONLY** after you're absolutely certain that the relationship is serious and could lead to a permanent commitment. Having said that, it's wonderful for you to have met a great guy, and we're aware that it's hard to move slowly when something feels so right to you. However, it's crucial to balance your romantic feelings for him with your parenting role as the main resource for your children's wellbeing, which often means waiting a number of months to a year (yes, sometimes that long!) before introducing a new partner into their lives. We want you to examine it from your children's point of view.

First, consider the ages of your children. Developmentally they're capable of only a certain level of understanding and emotional reasoning. A five-year-old, for example, would emotionally attach or react differently from a twelve-year-old or sixteen-year-old to this new person in his/her life. We can tell you that regardless of the age, a new person in their parent's life is experienced as unsettling by most all children.

Second, the relationship with their father or stepfather would need to be taken into account. Is this currently a positive and consistent relationship? Were the circumstances around the divorce difficult for the children? Was any type of trauma or abuse involved in their relationship with him, or was the ending of the relationship traumatic? These experiences affect how children would view a potential partner, their ability to accept him, and how much time they would need to feel comfortable with someone new.

Third, remember how important you are. A new partner is often perceived as someone who takes you away from them which creates emotional struggles for your child. If any type of trauma was involved in the past, it's especially difficult to see their mother choose to be with someone new.

Finally, we can't emphasize enough that your children's feelings about your new partner are to be respected, and we advise against attempts to "win them over" or reassure them that they have nothing to worry about. Balance your dates with family time and one-on-one time without him. Arrange to see him when the children are spending the night out with friends or otherwise occupied so that his presence isn't so prevalent. In other words, slow this down so your children have time to get used to the idea of someone new in their life, and back him out of their day to day life if you notice them struggling.

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