

From dam to glam: Dating after divorce

The dating game, and how to ensure you are putting your children's best interests first.

By: Deborah Moskovitch



Children often have difficulty with a divorced parent's first move into the dating world. Many children, no matter how old, fantasize about mommy and daddy getting back together and becoming part of one big happy family again. While deep down your children know fantasy will likely not become a reality, moving on to the next chapter in your life requires balance and sensitivity.

When Barbara Steinman* first started dating again, she found "dating was exciting and took up a lot of time. I didn't have balance in my life. I was going out a lot and then realized I had to pull back and spend more time at home with my kids."

Steinman says she also felt self-conscious, wondering what other people would think of her.

"After being married for so many years I hadn't thought of myself in terms of being appealing to men in a relationship or sexual sense, rather than as friends."

Common sense, rather than rules, is required when balancing your family life with your personal life. You want to develop confidence while dating, but avoid the drama which can result, causing chaos and distraction in your life.

Professional advice

Jacqueline Vanbetlehem, a mediator and family therapist in Oakville, encourages her clients to consider the dynamics of dating when they first start out.

“A new partner can be a significant distraction and can take away your attention when your child may need the attention more than ever,” she says. “Parents need to be aware of that.”

Carole Linden, a matchmaker in Thornhill, recommends to her clients that they be on their own for at least six months before they start dating again. She counsels them to look inwards.

“Look at what worked and what didn’t in your marriage and explore who you are and what you want so that you don’t repeat relationship patterns.”

Vanbetlehem advises that, as much as possible, you keep things the same for your children in the first year post separation and divorce to “help kids transition into their new life going from a two parent household to a one parent household; they need time to get used to what this is going to look like.”

5 things to keep in mind

Here are the top 5 things to consider when introducing a new man into your children’s lives and ideas as to how to put their best interest first:

Introduce a new partner only if you feel it is a significant relationship. Children do not need to meet every man you date. You are your children’s role model; you want them to have a positive outlook on relationships and feel stability and a sense of security. If you introduce your children to someone new too quickly and the relationship ends, your children might be more cautious and won’t be as inclined to develop a relationship the next time they meet someone important to you. Don’t rush to introduce your children too early on in the relationship.

Be mindful of where your children are at emotionally and cognitively. Your children may be a little guarded at the beginning of this new introduction. It is probably much easier for a younger child to bond with someone new because they live in the moment. Teenagers are more likely to judge the person and may be protective of their other parent because you now have a new partner in your life.

Plan ahead how the introduction is going to take place. Keep the introduction casual and forewarn your children that they are going to be meeting your new partner; don't surprise them with the meeting. The introduction should take place in an environment where your children feel secure and comfortable and can remove themselves from the situation if they don't feel at ease.

Ask your children how they feel about your new partner. If there is an issue with this new person in your life, try to address the concern. To simply ignore the situation and hope it will go away will only make things worse.

You may want to introduce your new partner to the other parent. It is not so that they can be friends, but because this person is now part of your children's world. You do not want your children to feel that they have to keep your relationship a secret, or that they can't talk about this person with their other parent. It gives your children the message that it is all right for them to like your new partner.

So put on your favourite frock and make plans for a fabulous evening. Knowing how to put your children's best interests first will give you a sense of comfort, calm and the freedom to enjoy yourself.

Concerned about your finances after divorce? There's hope: Minimize the post-divorce financial fallout. Or find out what your dating style is - take the quiz!

Deborah Moskovitch is a divorce consultant and educator, and author of The Smart Divorce: Proven Strategies and Valuable Advice from 100 Top Divorce Lawyers, Financial Advisers, Counselors and Other Experts. Deborah has become an opinion leader in the media and has shared her insights and research on television and radio to explain that divorce can be managed in smarter ways. To learn more visit thesmartdivorce.com

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