



Trauma  
Care

# Newsletter

## TraumaCare

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## Introducing your new partner to your child

Meeting someone new and falling in love, especially after separation or divorce, can be one of the most positive and exciting times in our lives. Introducing a new partner to your children is something that requires some thought before you go ahead and a decision not to be taken lightly.

Questions that spring to mind include: When should I introduce a new partner to the children? What role does a new partner play in our child's life? Read the following tips to help you plan how to go about it...



You might think your new partner is the greatest thing since sliced bread, but at one time you thought the same thing about the person whose name is on the bottom of the restraining order you just got. It's hard to resist the power of someone who not only makes you feel good about yourself but reinforces your negative feelings about your ex.

With all of that conflict to concentrate on (especially if both of you are going through divorces), who has time to create trouble in the new relationship? What happens as a result is an extended "honeymoon period" in the new relationship. Having your kids along with your new partner helps legitimize the relationship, especially if your kids like your new partner's kids and everyone gets along—but it might very well place unnecessary pressure on the kids.

### When is the right time?

Introduce a new partner to your children when the relationship is happy, stable and you are sure that the relationship has a future. Kids learn about how to behave from us. Try to avoid exposing them to a succession of fleeting partners. Adults arriving and then leaving their lives, once they have become attached, can impact on our children's ability to form long lasting relationships in the future. It can also be very unsettling for them.

## Keep things slow and casual in relation to your children

You may be excited by a new relationship but your children may feel frightened, threatened, angry or confused. Respect their feelings. Take things slowly. When it feels right to introduce them to a new partner, keep things as casual as you can - This is mum or dad's boyfriend or girlfriend, not a replacement parent!



One reason to take it very slow in having your children cozy up to your new partner is that often, the "second time around" relationship is just as bad as or worse than the first relationship you had, and you want to get away from that person too. That may be fine for you, but what if your kids like that person and the people who tag along with him or her? What happens then is that your children go through another round of sad separations, and ultimately they become mistrustful and suspicious of the next round of people you bring them into contact with. For kids, these separations can be as painful as the divorce from their mother or father.

Then there are the situations where you bring your children into contact with your new partner and they hate that person. What you have created in that circumstance is a pipeline of complaints that go from your children to the other parent, and that creates yet another set of problems.

Children of divorced parents often feel split loyalties between a new partner or parent figure and a biological parent. This is made worse when one of the biological parents is insecure or angry. It is very easy for children to pick up on, and as a result they try to please and soothe that parent by being critical of Mom or Dad's new boyfriend or girlfriend.

With all of the problems that are associated with bringing children into contact with new boyfriends and girlfriends, it is a wonder why people do it with such frequency. There are two main reasons: One is that when parents separate they yearn for the return of a "normal" life with a companion. In their desire to create that normal life, they make decisions too quickly or without thinking through all of the possibilities and often end up replacing one dysfunctional relationship with another. As adults we are entitled to do this until we get it right, but we should try to avoid exposing children to our dating disasters. Related to this is the second main reason—when a parent adopts the philosophy that "My kids and I come as a package deal. If you think you want to be with me, my kids have to approve." This is a perfectly reasonable philosophy, but it must be employed later rather than sooner. You should figure out whether the person is worth having your children evaluate them first.

## Talk to and listen to your children

Before your children meet your new partner, talk to them, explain the situation. Then listen hard to what they say and give them time to talk about anything they are worried about. Reassure them about how much you love them (they may be nervous, particularly if they sense that you are acting differently). Quite reasonably they may fear that you will pay them less attention.

Whilst you don't want to let your kids think that they can decide whether you keep your new partner or not, the relationship they form with your partner will have a huge impact on how things work out. If the children aren't presented with a 'done deal' i.e, if they feel that the future of their family has been decided with out their feelings being considered they are less likely to feel angry or upset.

## What's in it for me?

If your new partner has children, your children may be more interested in their children than they are in your new partner. What's in it for them will be different from what's in it for you. On the first occasion that you introduce the children to a new partner, it may be worth all meeting together, rather than you meeting your partner's kids then they meeting yours. (It also means that no one is likely to feel left out).



Having someone new in your life may mean that you pay your children a little less attention – this is not necessarily a bad thing. It can be good for your children to have 'space' to become their own person, and it is good for them to see you happy and to see that you have a life of your own. See Time with your kids below.

## Your new partner and your ex

If your ex plays a role in your children's lives it is your responsibility to tell them about your new partner, ideally before you tell the children. Tell your ex as a courtesy and in relation to it being an event in your children's lives, rather than it being an event in your life. Don't use the information as a way to score points. Don't allow your child to become a 'go-between' in terms of breaking the news to your ex also don't expect them to 'keep secrets' from your ex.

## Sleeping over

Different people have different ideas about whether parents should invite their boyfriends or girlfriends to sleep over at their house. I would say avoid it, especially with young children. Children are growing up very quickly these days, and they will start to ask questions about whether you are having sex with your boyfriend or girlfriend because you are sleeping with them. You could properly tell them this is none of their business, but the situation will nevertheless make them feel uncomfortable, and you will ultimately have to deal with what kind of model this presents to your children, especially when they are fifteen years old and want to bring their boyfriends and girlfriends home to your house to sleep over.

Finally, it might be very tempting to bring your little children into bed with you and your new partner to snuggle or watch television, but I have seen this cause problems between moms and dads who become furious at the thought of their children climbing into bed with someone who is a "stranger" to them and cuddling. Before you permit your child to do this, ask yourself it is worth the legal fees you will have to spend in order to convince someone that you think there is no harm in it.

Ideally, you should wait for your children to have met your partner on a number of occasions and hopefully everyone feels relaxed with each other before they stay for 'sleepovers' if the children are in the house. Tell your children that your partner will be sleeping over. Ideally try and involve your partner in family meals rather than your partner only turning up when the children have gone to bed.

## Spend time with your kids

Don't let time with your new partner consume all the time you spend with the kids. Make sure you still have plenty of one-on-one time with your children. During any transition or change children are likely to need to see more of you.

## Changes in children's behaviour

If your children are acting up and behaving badly, try not to get angry (because you think they might be showing you up or trying to sabotage your new relationship). It probably means they are trying to tell you something. Create some alone time with your children individually and show that you really want to know what they are feeling. Try not to shut them off because you don't want to hear or don't like what they might have to say. Whilst you are feeling that you have a lot to gain they may feel that they are losing you. They may also feel conflicted in their loyalty to their other parent. Give your children space and time to form their own relationship with your new partner. Respect your children's feelings even if they are not what you'd like them to be. The outcome is more likely to be happy that way.

Introducing a new partner to your children can be a rocky time and emotions can run high. The more anxious you are to make it work, the more the children will pick up on this and possibly rebel. Take it slow. Be prepared to create breathing and thinking spaces. Most importantly, give your kids love and attention (rather than gifts and bribes!) and show them that they are still your priority. The fact that you have someone new to love and love you back is one of life's gifts; it's something to be cherished. Show your kids that if anything there is more, not less, love to go around.

It's important that we trust our own judgement - only we know the individuals involved and the details of our own situation. However, it can be a tricky and stressful time leaving us feeling torn in different directions.

## Quick Tips

- When it comes to introducing your kids to the people you are dating, wait, wait, wait. Then think it through, wait some more, and start talking about the person who is becoming special and whom you would like them to meet. Even when you are careful as can be, children might not warm up to the idea of your dating for a long time. One thing is certain—if you rush it, there will be problems.
- Never, ever bring your children around a partner or lover while you are still married. It might seem overly strict, but it can save you lots of stress in the end.
- Split loyalties are common when children are brought into a relationship with a parent's new partner. It will take patience and an ability to be warm, but stay in the background to get past this.

Live so that  
when your  
children  
think of fairness,  
caring &  
integrity,  
they think of you.

This newsletter has been issued by:

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