

Cohabitation and Remarriage

Cohabitation or remarriage is yet another transition for children and it takes time for them to adjust to the new situation. Young children may be especially concerned with the reliability and stability of their parent's new partner. When the custodial parent gets remarried, children must often change homes or schools. This also may mean moving further away from their other parent. It is important that parents still spend quality time with their children, without the new partner. A remarriage is more likely to be successful if the new family forms slowly. Establishing rules and rituals that apply to everyone in the family create a smoother transition for children.

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Monthly tip for families:
Have a special "movie night" with your children.

Helpful Tips for Cohabitation and Remarriage

- **Talk with children about the divorce**
Parents should talk with their children about their divorce as much as needed. This ensures children that the new relationship is not the reason for their parent's divorce. It is important not to involve the new partner in details about the divorce if possible.
- **Talk with children about dating**
Without going into detail, parents should explain to their children that they are dating. Talking with the ex-spouse is important as well. This helps keep children from being put in the middle of their parents. Children should not have to keep the new relationship a secret or have to tell their other parent.
- **A divorced family is still a family**
Children and ex-spouses will be part of any new relationships the parent establishes following a divorce. Recognizing these facts will help all family members adjust to new partners and their children.
- **Take care when choosing a new partner**
Parenting is challenging, and stepparenting can be even more challenging. Choosing a partner who is interested in children is an important factor to consider.
- **Take care when introducing a new partner**
Limit interactions with children and new partners, unless they are somebody the parent is seeing regularly and seriously. Children can become attached to new adults in their life. In order to avoid more losses children may experience, parents should make sure there is a good chance the relationship will continue. It is also important for parents to do fun activities with children without the new partner.
- **Give children time**
Children may be reluctant to accept a new adult into their lives. Children may have hard feelings toward their parent's new partner. Children may experience loyalty conflicts between a parent's new partner and their other parent's feelings. Talking with children and understanding their point of view can help new partners and parents not rush this new relationship.
- **New partners and stepparents**
Establishing a parental role with children takes time. New partners and stepparents should be aware of this, and should not expect to create a parental role with children right away. It is important for adults to take an interest in the children and become friends first. Before assuming a disciplinarian role, new partners and stepparents need to create a friendship with children.
- **Recognize that every child is different**
Parents need to understand that every child is different. Young children may be more open to new adults in their lives. Older children may be more reluctant about the new partner, especially if they are close to both of their parents.
- **Remarriage is not the re-creation of a two-parent family**
Remarriage is a major transition in children's lives. It is important for parents to express their love and support for their children through this transition.

Additional Resources:

www.extension.usu.edu/stepfamily

www.healthyrelationshipsutah.org

www.strongermarriage.org

www.stepfamilies.info

www.twoofus.org

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