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## **Dating a Single Parent**

Dating a single parent is a situation that singles frequently encounter. Finding the right balance among you, the parent you are dating and his or her child is the key to maintaining a healthy relationship. While dating a single parent may present some new challenges at first, there are things you can do to put your relationship on the right track.

### **Your Relationship with the Child**

The number one concern that most children have when one of their parents begins dating again is that the parent will no longer have time for them. The child expresses this in different ways depending on his or her age and maturity. The child may begin to resent or reject you. A serious relationship may threaten the child, especially if the child has hopes of his or her parents getting back together. The child may start comparing you to his or her other parent. Your best way to resolve these issues is to bond with the child. While this may sound easy on paper, it can be quite difficult in practice.

If you cannot make a committed effort to bond with the child, that is probably a sign you are not ready to commit to your relationship with the parent. If you are serious about your relationship with the child's parent, then it is up to you, not the child, to make this bonding effort. Always keep in mind that you are not the child's parent, so do not approach the child in that manner; it might make the child uncomfortable. Once you get to know the child and your relationship with his or her parent is on solid ground, start taking the child out on fun "family" outings. This is a great way to forge a friendship with the child and strengthen your relationship with the parent. Here are some suggestions for great ways to get to know each other:

- Take bike rides together;
- Hike through forest preserves;
- Spend a day at the zoo;
- Have picnics in the park;
- Bake cookies together;

- Visit a museum. Interactive museums can be especially fun;
- Enjoy a day at the movies (let the child pick the show); and
- Visit an amusement park.

It may take a while for the child to warm up to you. Try not to take this personally; it probably has more to do with the child's fears about where the relationship is headed and what it means to the child than with a dislike of you. Deal with this as sensitively as you can.

In some cases, the child will bond too intensely with you because he or she sees you as a surrogate parent. Try to manage this relationship, especially if you are not sure how serious you want to get with the parent. Know where you are heading with your relationship with the parent, and use that to gauge how close you should become with the child.

## **Understand a Parent's Concern**

Many single parents prefer to be choosy and concentrate on only those relationships they feel have long-term potential. Exposing a child to numerous potential partners can be upsetting and confusing.

Sometimes your partner may not be as involved with you as you would like. Kids have to come first for single parents. If you understand this and adjust your expectations for the relationship, you will be much better off emotionally. No one wins if you get into an emotional tug of war with a child. Once you have established a stable, serious relationship with the parent, your star will rise.

Talk with your partner about what he or she wants out of this relationship in the short and long term. Is the parent interested in marriage or does she want to remain single? What role should you have in the upbringing of the parent's child? Is the parent open to having another child with you? Have these discussions as soon as you feel the relationship is becoming serious. It will help you manage the relationship with both your partner and the child and avoid heartache for everyone involved

## **Relating to the Other Parent**

If you are in it for the long haul, you may have to develop some sort of relationship with the child's other biological parent. This can be a tricky situation, as you both will have to set aside any feelings of jealousy. Remember, this is your partner's ex and the parent of his or her child, but you are the one your partner has chosen to be with now. Stick to the wishes of your partner in navigating these waters. It could be that you will never meet the ex or will see the ex only on rare occasions. All parties may welcome your involvement in day-to-day discipline or rule setting, but you may also be asked to stay out of this

realm altogether. Make sure you can live without resentment with whatever expectations are defined.

Despite the complexity of dating a single parent, there are also significant joys to be found. It may be a welcome relief to be in a relationship with a partner who has serious goals and commitments. Your relationship with the child, whether it evolves into a parent-like situation or remains a mentoring big brother- or big sister-style relationship, can enrich your life in wonderful and unexpected ways. The skills you develop in communicating openly, negotiating tough issues and planning for the future will help you throughout your relationship and your life.

**Call us for the support that you need. 1-888-290-4EAP (TDD: 1800-697-0353) or go to [www.GuidanceResources.com](http://www.GuidanceResources.com). Agency ID: FEDSOURCE**

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