

10 Steps to Introducing a New Partner to your Children

If you parent alone, there is no need to introduce your child to every person you meet or date. It's only when you feel that a relationship may be going somewhere that you should introduce this new person to your child. Remember, if your child witnessed you being hurt in a previous relationship they will be protective of you and may not necessarily want a new person around. You need to be aware of this and discuss it with your child, no matter what their age.

Step 1

Be open with your child by letting them know that you need to socialise and meet new people. When you meet someone and feel that the relationship is going to blossom, then it is time to introduce them to your family.

Step 2

Talk to your new partner about your child/ren and what life is like for you as a family. Explain what your child experienced in your past relationships and what their fears may be. Tell them about your child's relationship with the other parent.

Step 3

Talk to your child about your new partner. Your children may not be too happy about it – they may be concerned about their own needs being met and you need to listen to what their fears may be. Then, reassure them that you will be there to meet their needs as best you can.

Step 4

Set up a meeting between your children and your new partner. Fun activities such as bowling, going out for lunch, the cinema and the zoo are all good ideas. Choose somewhere neutral so the children feel at ease and so that this new stranger is not invading their space. Keep it short.

Step 5

Discuss the first meeting with the children and your partner separately. Acknowledge what they felt and try to understand their needs. Don't ever dismiss feelings as this will discourage the person from saying how they truly feel in the future. Use the second meeting to try to combat any negative feelings.

Step 6

The second meeting needs to be very relaxed but with more opportunity for your children and new partner to talk to each other. Activities which allow for interaction, such as playing football or going to the playground, are good ideas.

After a few meetings, you may be ready to invite your partner around for a meal. Ensure your child is involved in the preparations and knows that your new partner is coming to see everyone. However, you are also a couple, so you need to make it very clear to your child that you will need to spend some time alone with your partner.

Step 7

In order for time alone with your partner to work well you need to ensure you also have time alone with your child. Quality time. This is when you and your child do something together for 20 minutes every day. It's very important so that everyone feels they have a special place in your life. Don't forget to give yourself some special time too to reflect on how you feel.

Step 8

If and when your partner starts to stay overnight, you can describe it as a sleep over to younger children. You need to be careful with older teenage children as you are a role model for them - explain how you feel about your new partner and why you want them to start staying over. Create the ground rules with both parties. Lock the bedroom door, lock the bathroom door, wear dressing gowns. You do not want children to witness things they do not need to see. Also your partner needs to feel comfortable. Don't make too big a deal out of it.

Step 9

If it reaches the stage where your partner is staying over quite often then the time has come for this relationship to be taken one step further. You need to allow your partner to be part of your child's life. You need to talk to them about how you parent and why you do things as you do. You also need to look at how they interact with your child. If they are at home alone with your child, how should they handle misbehaviour? These are the type of things that can cause problems so it is really important to discuss them.

Step 10

If the other parent is still involved in your child's life, tell them about your new relationship once you feel it is going to last.

The other parent may be afraid that they will no longer be needed in their child's life. You need to ensure them that they are an important part of your child's life and that you want them to stay very much involved.

Finally remember you are all in this together. Everyone needs to play a part if your new relationship is to work. Your child can really benefit from seeing you in a healthy and respectful relationship. They need to see how adults can have lasting and loving relationships, having witnessed a relationship breaking down. Problems can and will arise but if you sit down and talk about things as they occur, involving everyone, you can usually work things out.