

## JACK'S CORNER

**QUESTION:** I've been divorced for a couple of years and have begun to date. My kids (I have primary custody.) get along great with the person I'm dating. So far, so good. I want to do this right. Any suggestions?

**ANSWER:** "Doing it right" means placing your needs and wants beneath those of your children. In my opinion, you have made a mistake; you will have to work on damage control. Consider the following:

1. Realize that your children will have conflicted feelings about you dating. Although on the one hand, they might "like" the person your are dating, on the other hand, this is the beginning of the end for any hope your children still have that you will get back together with their mother.
2. Don't set them up for another fall. **Until you and your newest interest have set a date for marriage, there should be no contact or very minimal contact between your children and your date\***. I know this approach is not popular or common (Probably because it requires parents to put their children's needs before their own wants and desires). But, if things don't work out with the two of you, your children will be forced to endure another break up. This relationship is just as much about them as it is about you.
3. Don't teach them that relationships are like merry-go-rounds. When you want to, you can just get off. You might date quite a few people before you decide to marry. Don't force your kids to get on the ride with you every time.
4. As a Christian, this goes without saying, but I'll say it anyway: never become sexually involved with your dates. God calls this fornication. Remain abstinent until you are remarried.
5. Divorce by itself speaks volumes to children about their parents. Sadly, most of it is not good (This isn't a judgment, it is simply a fact.). Dating will speak another volume. Make your life a moral showcase of exemplary behavior.
6. When you have a date for remarriage; calmly, lovingly, seriously and prayerfully talk with your children about (1) What they can expect. (2) What changes will happen in their

lifestyle. (3) How problems will be handled. (4) How they are feeling about all this. (5) How this marriage will affect the visits with the other parent.

\*Since your children already have a relationship with your date, you will have to have a heart-to-heart talk with them explaining how you have made a serious mistake. Your date should be with you during this talk as you explain how you are deeply concerned with “doing this right” and guarding their hearts. Tell them “doing it right” means that your date will back out of having a lot of involvement with them, because you are not yet certain where your relationship is headed. Is this painless? No, but you are doing damage control here. It will be better than setting them up for big time pain later. It also speaks to your personal integrity and concern for them. This approach will also speak to the character of the one you have chosen to date.

May God bless your sacrifice and commitment to your children!

Jack Lipski, M.A.

SOTHCS Counselor

(Permission to copy granted for personal use only.)