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**Dating Tips for Divorced and Widowed Moms**

**By Terry MacDonald**

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Dating is tough, but it's tougher for women who are divorced and widowed. Along with the fears of being "out of practice," there are often children's feelings to consider.

How can a single mother enjoy a new romance without lying awake at night worrying about doing emotional damage to her children? Personal Strengths and Life Coach Sue Tosto of Garfield, New Jersey provides the answers.

1. How soon after divorce or the death of a husband is it appropriate to start dating?

It depends on the individual, but anyone going through a divorce should wait at least six months to one year before even considering dating someone new. Emotions are running high, and a person needs time to heal before putting herself back on the market. Some newly divorced or widowed people jump into relationships too early because they're afraid of being alone. That's almost always a mistake.

The first year after a divorce is the time to re-group and focus on making new friendships. A woman can reflect on all the things she wanted to do when she was married but didn't. This is a rough time emotionally, but it helps to view it as a fresh start. It's the perfect time to re-develop a sense of self and decide what one really wants in life. A woman can consider what she hopes for in a new relationship and let go of the past in the process.

Dating after the death of a husband or partner is also not recommended for at least one full year. Two years is even better. The grieving process should never be rushed, and the length of time it takes for the bereaved to move on varies according to the individual.

Other matters to consider before dating include waiting until estate matters have been handled, i.e., insurance matters, review of the will, and the assignment of an executor or executrix if necessary. The stress a new relationship can cause during this emotional time is not recommended.

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As with divorce, this is a time to spend with friends. It also helps to join a support group of others who have lost a loved one.

### 2. How long should the mother wait before introducing a new boyfriend to her children?

She should know him at least six months to a year. Otherwise, if she decides after dating him for 4 months that the relationship is going nowhere, the children will inevitably feel another loss. No child should be put through that after going through divorce or death of a parent. Children need time to heal as well. If the new man doesn't respect that, he's probably not great boyfriend material.

The first three months of a relationship is the honeymoon period. Everything is fresh and exciting. After around six months, the couple tends to relax and good behavior wears off. A woman gets to see what she's really dealing with. Before she introduces her new beau to her children, she needs to find

out what his goals are, to see if his values and beliefs are consistent with hers, and really develop a friendship with him.

### 3. What is the best way to introduce a new boyfriend?

Once a woman decides to start dating, she should explain it to each of her children in an age-appropriate manner. After she and a new partner have spent six months to a year together, she can start telling the children things about him, particularly what she likes about him or little stories about places they've gone together. This way the children understand that Mom is still Mom, which is critical, but they'll also see that she's happier. They will slowly make the adjustment that they may soon share her with somebody else. Inevitably, the children will become curious about him. They may ask to meet him. I think it is wise to slowly incorporate the new partner into the family.

### 4. How should she handle it if the child resents the new relationship? Should she stop seeing the boyfriend?

Children will often resent a new relationship for the simple reason that they now have to share their mother with someone else. A woman can reassure her children that even though she is going out, she is coming back home to them. She should continue do the things with them she always did. Before she even starts dating, it might help to hire a babysitter and use the afternoon to go shopping, just to get the children accustomed to seeing her go out every once in a while.

Observing the children's reactions while the new man is around should provide some clues to other causes of resentment. A woman should also gently ask her children why they don't like her new partner. She should remember, though, that some children may not know exactly how to express why they dislike someone. It's important to tread carefully. A new relationship is stressful for the whole family.

If the children are really having a hard time with it, family counseling can get to the root of the problem, especially if all other avenues have been exhausted. The most important thing a single parent can do is to treat her children the same way she did before she met the new partner.

5. Is it ever acceptable to allow the boyfriend to sleep over, or should the couple book a babysitter and get a room?

Get a room, unless the kids are at Dad's for the weekend. Children don't need to see some stranger coming out of Mom's room in the morning (or their Dad's, either). A new relationship is exciting and the partners are certainly entitled to time alone, but a single parent must handle it delicately and deliberately. Her (or his) behavior will instruct the children about man/woman relationships in ways they will carry around with them for the rest of their lives.

Terry MacDonald is the author of *How to Attract and Marry the Man of Your Dreams (Even if You're Not Rich, Thin, or Beautiful)*. Visit her website at

### **Tips for Dating A Single MOm**

**By Teri Worten**

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Tips for dating a single mom

1) Be understanding. As you may know, most single moms can't drop everything on a whim to spend time with the men in their lives. However, with the proper planning and rearranging, most single moms enjoy a wonderful dating and social life! So, just give her a little notice.

2) Be understanding. Most single moms are (or should be) careful with their home space. For instance, a wise single mom wouldn't consider having you exposed to her children unless she really knows and trusts you. For instance, she may not let you meet her children immediately or she may not invite you in after a dinner date. Another example is that a single mom may opt to meet you at a restaurant as opposed to allowing you to pick her up from her home. More than likely, she's protecting her home space.

3) Be sensitive. Many single moms are products from painful divorces and hurtful past relationships. With this being so, a new man in her life might need to be exceedingly sensitive and aware that some single moms are a little gun-shy or fearful of being hurt.

4) Be realistic. Lots of moms are not looking for a make-shift daddy for their families. Most women are working, educating themselves and successfully raising their children on their own without a father in the house. So, for starters, don't assume that the single mom that you're dating wants or needs you to play "daddy" or spend time with her kids (early in the relationship). Focus your time on getting acquainted with the "woman" you are dating. Forget about the other stuff. After all, she's not really a big "package". Think of it this way: you're spending time with a beautiful woman. Not the beautiful woman, plus her ex-husband, plus the children, with the dog and divorce lawyer!

5) Be patient. A single mom will more than likely move a lot slower than completely unattached women. A single mom, is less likely to "fall into bed" with a man that is expendable or temporary. This is not

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because she is "scared" so much as she understands that she can't afford a lot of heartache and drama in her life. She understands that her emotional state affects her children. So be patient.

6) Be honest. Don't play games with any woman, much less a single mom. If you're looking for a quick unattached situation, let her know it at the onset. Who knows, she could be looking for something casual too. However, mislead her by spending excessive time building trust and intimacy only to abandon her later. This is sophomoric, childish and cruel. Instead, be forthcoming about what you want from the relationship and be brutally honest. A simple conversation about expectations could ward off a lot of anguish later.

Teri Worten is a freelance writer and the founder of several inspirational websites for women and

single moms. One is called Gotta Be Me, Girl.Com. You can access the site by following the link: <http://www.gottabemegirl.com>. Secondly, visit the Greater Kansas City Single Mom Network at <http://www.kcsinglemomnetwork.com>.

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