

Talking to Grieving Children About Dating



Beginning to Date

When a spouse or life partner dies, many people cannot fathom ever being in a relationship again or they simply believe there is nobody else out there for them. But many widows and widowers eventually change their minds and wish for a companion. Whatever your motivation for getting back in the dating game, it is important to remember that only you know when you are ready. This can be hard to acknowledge, especially when there are children involved. So, one of the most helpful things you can do is find support in friends and relatives who will be nonjudgmental. Here are some suggestions and thoughts from other widows and widowers based on their experiences.

- Talk to your children when you are first considering dating again. The earlier you tell them, the better. That way there are no surprises. If you wait until things are getting serious, your children may take it personally and think that you were trying to hide it from them or did not trust them with the information.
- Your children may express resistance in ways seemingly unrelated to the issue of your dating. These may include complaining of physical ailments, expressing dislike of a babysitter, or other things that would require you to spend more time with them.
- If you don't plan on introducing your dates to your children until it is serious, let both your dates and children know. You don't want either of them to think that you are hiding anything. When you do make the introductions, don't force your children to like the person you are dating, but do expect them to be polite and respectful.
- Be prepared to answer questions from your children. They may have questions about everything from why you are dating to whether or not you still love the deceased parent. Honesty and open communication are keys to maintaining a healthy relationship with your children.
- A parent dating can give rise to many different emotions in your children (guilt, fear, sadness, anger, resentment, hope). Recognizing these emotions as they appear can help you assess what your children may need from you. Ask your child: Why are you sad? What is making you angry? What can I do to help you?

Throughout the journey of dating again, maintain communication with, and continue to assure, your children. Make sure they know that your heart is big enough for both the new person you are dating and them; and that a new relationship in your life cannot and will not take their place or the place of the deceased parent. Explain to them that being a single parent is rewarding, but can also be difficult and lonely sometimes. Be open about your needs and ask your children to do the same. Lastly, if you have a hard time talking to your children about dating, seek the help of a counselor or therapist who can help you through this transition.

Continuing with a Long-Term Relationship

Although it may seem far off, especially if you have just started dating again, it is important to think ahead to what may happen if you and your new partner decide to take the relationship further. When you begin to think about making a relationship long-term – whether through marriage, cohabitation, or a partnership – there are a few extra factors to consider when talking to your children.

As with dating, talk to your children far in advance about your thoughts and feelings on marriage, cohabitation, or partnership so that they feel they have a say in the matter. Be sure that your children are ready for your new partner





to take on some sort of parental role in their lives. Assure the children that the new partner will not replace the deceased parent, but is there to help and be a source of comfort for the whole family. Bringing a new partner into your family after the death of a parent can be a challenging process, but keeping the lines of communication open can help calm your children's fears about the future and the family structure

Further Reading:

- *Healing A Spouse's Grieving Heart* by Alan D. Wolfelt
- *Finding Your Way After Your Spouse Dies* by Marta Felber

References:

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