

New partners

Most people eventually become involved with new partners. Sometimes this happens before the separation, making the marital breakdown more complicated. This is for two reasons:

- because the other spouse must deal with the extreme impact of the affair as well as with the breakdown of the marriage; and
- the children are often unreasonably expected to cope with a new relationship (with someone they will normally view as “the enemy”), as well as handling the trauma of the family breaking up.

The timing of introducing a new partner to the children should be considered very carefully. Not all relationships lead to a remarriage. Children may have to encounter a number of new partners in their divorced parents' lives.

Each new partner poses a new dilemma for the children, as well as for your ex-spouse:

- how seriously should this new relationship be taken;
- will it last or will it break down like the last one did; and
- is it worth investing energy and faith into making a relationship with this new partner or will it end leaving everyone confused and neglected (again)?

New relationships take a good deal of energy and commitment for children to adjust. They also threaten loyalties between children and their parents. Children can understandably feel jealous of a new person claiming their mother's or father's time and attention. This is particularly so if they feel the need for that time and attention themselves, which they almost certainly will around the time of separation.

If children do not accept a new partner, this can have disastrous consequences. It can affect the parent's new relationship, or it can undermine that parent's relationship with the child.

When enjoying the preoccupations of a new relationship, it is easy to make the wrong assumptions about how the children will feel. It is safer to assume the worst and invest sufficient care and thought in moving matters forward slowly.

On the other side of the coin, if it is your ex-spouse who has a new relationship, it is easy to cast the new partner in the role of the villain. This is particularly so if the relationship was there before you separated. This is understandable, but drawing children in to collude with that may add to their confusion and pain.

If the relationship is a long term one, then it may ultimately be helpful to the children to have another adult in their lives – another source of support and affection. This is sometimes seen as a threat to the standing of yourself as a parent. In practice, especially for the primary carer, that is an unlikely outcome.

When new partners appear on the scene, it is sometimes helpful to talk about one's feelings. Professional help – counselling or family therapy – can be helpful at this time.

Children in particular often have confused feelings with new partners on the scene. Counselling from expert third parties can also benefit them.

New partners can also impact upon the contact arrangements. These difficulties are often best dealt with in mediation. See the [approaches](#) section.