

# Single Parent Dating Cheat Sheet



*In many ways, dating as a single parent is just like dating for anyone else. But in other ways—many other ways—it’s completely different. To begin with, if you’re a single parent you’re probably also a working parent, and it’s doubtful that you have the time or the energy to study up on “the scene” or “the rules.” But before you turn your back on the dating world entirely, know this: you’re not helping your children or yourself by ignoring your social life. So think of the following as a dating cheat sheet: things to think about when it comes to who you’ll potentially date, your children, and your own needs.*

## **What Should I Look for in a Date?**

For a parent, particularly if your kids are small, it’s not so much “Is this person right for me?” as it is, “Is this person right for *us*?” So before you start looking around, first ask yourself what kind of a relationship you’re ready for. Are you needing a friend and casual companion, an exciting romance, or is it time for something long-term? Being honest with yourself will help guide you toward someone who is thinking along the same lines.

Whatever your relationship goals, as a single parent you probably want someone who:

- Is willing to take things slowly and gradually, and wait at each step until you’re ready to move forward.
- Is open to getting to know the kids on your terms and according to your schedule, and is genuinely interested in finding out about their likes, dislikes, talents and quirks.
- Lets *you* be the parent; doesn’t judge your routines or try to be the disciplinarian.
- Is fun and playful with your children yet treats them with respect; deals with each kid in an age-appropriate way without being condescending or competitive.
- Is considerate, and treats you in a manner you’d like your children to model.
- Takes your lead about waiting to be physically affectionate in front of the kids—don’t rush this!
- Is able to hang in there and be patient if your children are jealous and try to interfere with the relationship.
- Understands that you need to put the children first at times.

- Doesn’t have a problem with family rituals like birthdays and holidays.
- Is aware of how complicated a parent’s life can be, and can roll with the punches when the unexpected happens.
- Wants to spend time both with you alone, and as the relationship develops, with the children along.

## **Do I Need to Worry About My Children?**

Sure, your kids are your best friends. But when you start dating, they can easily become your worst nightmare. (This is especially true if you’re a single mom!) There are many ways a parent can prepare children for the changes that may be coming, and most of them involve keeping the communication lines open.

If you’re ready to start looking, or have already met that special someone:

- Make sure your kids have dealt with their emotions surrounding your split-up, or the absence of another parent. If there’s stuff that’s unresolved, talk about it and let them know that their feelings are OK. Don’t be afraid of turning to a counselor to help clear the air.
- Before going out on a date, find a steady babysitter or family member whom you trust, and your children feel comfortable with.
- Set aside time for the kids, as well as time that’s yours for dating, and try your best not to sacrifice one for the other.
- Allow yourself to really, really, really get to know the other person before you even considering introducing them to the children.

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- Have regular talks with your children about what's going on in your life, and who's in it if you're seeing someone they might meet. Answer questions but set boundaries—you are entitled to your privacy.
- Always introduce anyone you're dating as a friend, nothing more.
- Make it clear to your kids that they should be polite and respectful to any of your new friends.
- Don't expect the kids to be as crazy about your new beaux as you are. At first, it's more likely that they'll be angry, sad, shy or just plain obnoxious and want to sabotage the relationship. Acknowledge their feelings, and give everyone time to get to know each other.
- Do listen to your children if they have opinions about the person who you're dating. Keep in mind that there might be an agenda, but often kids are very intuitive.
- Avoid overnight visits. If sexual intimacy is part of your relationship, keep sleepovers and your life with the kids entirely separate for as long as possible.

## How Can I Take Care of Myself?

The biggest gift a single parent can give themselves as they re-enter the dating world is time. Start dating again when *you're* ready, not when anyone else says you should be. Be careful of rushing into another relationship to help you heal from a broken one. Give yourself some slack as you get used to seeing yourself in a new light. Keep up your confidence and remember who you "used" to be if you've been hiding behind parenthood. And stay open to new ways of meeting people: check out divorce support groups and online dating sites; seriously network with your friends and think about interesting people in your life you might not have previously considered dating; or contact Parents

Without Partners at [www.parentswithoutpartners.org](http://www.parentswithoutpartners.org) to find your local chapter—a social life with another single parent can be complicated, but it's often a relief if you're both dealing with the same issues.

Finally, as you start to see other people:

- **Don't feel guilty.** If it makes you feel any better about your nights out, tell yourself that you're doing this as much for your children as yourself—it's true!
- **Leave the kids at home.** Of course your children are a significant part of your life, but don't let the conversation be all about them. Popular advice for the first date from other single parents: "Pretend like you're single."
- **Don't rush introductions.** After you have been seeing someone for awhile and when it feels right, introduce your friend to the kids in a way that keeps things light and easy—maybe a dinner or movie together. Hold off on extended family outings until the kids feel comfortable.
- **Keep your ex out of it.** Yes, they're bound to hear that you're dating and may want to talk about it, or even get involved. Remember that as long as your children are safe, your relationships outside of the home have nothing to do with the other parent.
- **Get help if you think you need it, and even if you don't.** Dating isn't an easy thing under any circumstances, and having children who themselves could still be traumatized by a divorce or other difficult circumstances may tip the scales. Talk to a friend, or better yet a trained therapist about what you're feeling, and what you're up against. Let someone else take some of the pressure off. Who knows? Maybe you'll find that then you can really relax, and even have some fun.