

# When Your Child Dislikes Your New Partner

**A**s a divorced, single, or widowed parent, it's always nerve-wracking to introduce your child to a new boyfriend or girlfriend. You care so much about everyone involved, and you really want them all to get along. Of course, you have a special, deep loyalty to your child! But at the same time, you're probably crazy about that new special someone.

## Hitting a Bump in the Road

Almost all families are going to experience a few bumps in the road when a parent starts dating again. After all, this is a big adjustment for everyone. But what should you do if your child appears to dislike this new partner, or even outright rejects him or her? Maybe your son or daughter is "nice" to your partner's face, but unloads resentment and hostility on you later. Sometimes, things seem to start off okay, but go downhill after some time has passed. Or it could be that he or she is outright unpleasant from the start.

These situations definitely happen, and there's no denying that they can be painful and difficult. Though you may feel guilty and conflicted, don't panic.

## Many Reasons for This Issue

First of all, remember that your child's reaction may not actually be about the individual person at all. It's very possible that your son or daughter is *not* reacting to anything in particular about him or her.

Instead, maybe this new person seems like a threat to a strong relationship with the other parent--or, on the other hand, reminds him or her of problems that exist there. It could also be the case that your moving on to a new relationship serves as a difficult reminder to your child that the old marriage or relationship is truly over.

Children may also feel threatened or displaced by your interest in a new adult. It might seem like this other person is going to take up all your time and energy.

Finally, children and teens may be embarrassed by their parent having a romantic life or concerned by the introduction of a new figure who could take on parental roles. If marriage is on the horizon, this becomes more significant.

### **Take Time to Listen**

Of course, it's also possible that your child and your new partner just don't get along--or that something is "off" about their interactions. If this is the case, there's likely nothing serious at the root of the issue, but listen with an open mind and talk it over with your child. What are some other ways to cope if this is the reality at your house?

- **Reassure your child that you still have plenty of time for him or her.**

Explain that you need time with adults, just like he or she needs time with friends their age, but that you'll always have time for them, too.

- **Be discreet about intimacy.**

If your relationship with your new partner has become sexual, don't parade this fact in front of the kids.

- **Do a "reality check."**

If you suspect your son or daughter is still hoping for a reunion between you and your ex, gently explain that this is not possible. You wouldn't want him or her to blame your new partner for "making" this impossible.

- **Encourage your child to communicate with you.**

Let your child know that he or she can talk with you about his or her feelings, even if they are difficult. Don't rule out the possibility that he or she is picking up on something you may be missing.

- **Take it slow.**

Attempts to force a relationship, especially with older children and teens, often backfire. Let things develop at their own pace. It's not necessary for your new partner to buy presents or try to "wow" the child. If your partner does not have children, he or she may be nervous and just need some time.

That last tip is probably the most important. It could be that the most you can hope for at first is basic politeness. With time and patience, however, a relationship may begin to blossom. In the meantime, don't rush things, and continue to enjoy your time with both your child and your significant other.

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