ask the family expert:
Yes, Mom Has a Love Life

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Q: I am a single mom. I recently started dating someone and I would like to introduce him to my kids, but I want to do what's best for them. Will bringing this new person into my children's lives cause emotional damage? What is the best way to introduce him to my children?

What a great question! I tend to give parents this rule of thumb: If, after three to six months of dating, your new partner and you feel the relationship is working well, then it is probably okay to start slowly introducing them. You will not cause emotional damage to your children if you take things slowly and really get to know the person first.

Some parents feel the need to rush into introductions to see if the new partner is going to "click" with their kids before they invest too much time in the relationship. Try to avoid doing this; it is your job, not theirs, to decide if he's a keeper or not. Besides, there are other ways to find out if your new partner is good with kids. Notice: How is he around his own kids or other people's kids? How does he respond when you talk about your kids?

When the time is right, make that first introduction fun and low-key. Meet at a park or plan an activity such as bowling or miniature golf. This will allow your kids and your new partner to warm up to each other slowly; it also relieves them of any pressure to have lengthy conversations. Respect your children's boundaries by not having the first meeting in the home, and try not to have your partner at your home for overnight visits until you're sure your kids are comfortable with him.

The way your kids respond to a new partner in your life depends largely on your family's specific circumstances: How have you and your ex handled the divorce? How have your children adjusted to the divorce? If their father passed away, how long has it been? No matter what, if

you keep the lines of communication open with your kids, they will let you know if things are moving too fast for them.

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