

## New Relationships - Proceed With Caution

By Randy Mergler, M.S. LMFT

Often divorced parents will ask when it is appropriate to get involved in a relationship again. I usually respond with my hands by making a diamond sign, and saying three words: proceed with caution. When I am teaching the Co-Parent class it is not unusual for participants to tell me that they have now met the “love of their life.” Although the parent may believe that this person is the love of their life, you can be pretty certain that this new person is not the love of their children’s lives. That role is reserved for mom and dad. It is possible that a child may become attached to this new person in their life, especially when the parent has chosen to integrate the new romance into the family right away. If the new relationship doesn’t work out, the parent and children are faced with yet another loss. And statistically, rebound relationships do not have high success rates.

Our children need us to be parents – perhaps now more than ever. We can choose to leave the parenting up to the other parent, or we can step up to the plate ourselves. Right now a wise choice might be to allow yourself some “down time” or emotional distance before initiating another intimate relationship. Take the time you need to look at what really happened in your marriage. What can you learn before you go on? What part of the end of the relationship belongs to you? It is a sign of health and maturity to take time before moving into a new relationship.

A divorce can be seen as a wake-up call. It provides us with opportunities to grow, make changes in our lives and even head our lives in a different direction. Following are some suggestions to help you move your process along.

1. Spend more time with your children *doing what they want to do*. See this as a golden opportunity to really get to know those precious little beings that you brought into this world.
2. Sign up for and take a divorce-adjustment class like the 10-week course – ***Rebuilding When Your Relationship Ends*** taught in Fort Collins by Will Moore and Arlene Brown (970-221-1440).
3. Focus on doing activities that you like to do. Make new friends. For many parents, post-divorce, a new friendship with a member of the opposite sex can be both a lifesaver and an eye opener. This is one of the reasons a support group or class like the one mentioned above can be a great idea. Many of us have never had a good, non-sexual friend of the opposite sex. Years after a divorce, many parents will say that the friendship they had with someone of the opposite sex during and after the divorce was one of the best things to come out of their divorce. It was an opportunity to really learn about men and women, and feel supported in ways they never dreamed possible.

Oh, and about that new relationship – the one with the love of your life. If it's the real thing, it will be there even after you've taken the time you need to find healthy closure for your marriage and see to it that your kids are stable, secure and adjusting to all of the changes that came with the divorce. Just remember – proceed with caution.

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