

TEN SIMPLE RULES FOR WHEN THERE'S

A NEW PARTNER IN YOUR LIFE

1. Have your priorities straight. Keep your hormones under control when making decisions. Maybe it's more important for you to be at your child's school play than away for the weekend with your new partner.

2. Nobody loves a parade. Don't introduce your kids to every man/woman you meet. Wait until you're secure in the relationship before you let your kids see someone as your "girlfriend." Have a reliable sitter lined up so you don't end up bringing children along before you're ready.

3. Don't ask too much too soon. Don't make the new person your parenting partner right away. For example, don't ask her/him to pick up your child from day care just because it's on the way.

4. Know the signs of trouble. They say "love is blind" but blindness can be dangerous. Watch for signs that your new partner is trouble: he/she could be abusive, involved with drugs or alcohol, have money problems, or be a sexual predator of children. Don't kid yourself – you can't change anyone and his/her trouble will become your trouble.

5. Nothing but the truth. It's good to be discreet and careful when you are with a new partner, but it's not okay to do things you wouldn't want your child to do as a young adult. If you can't explain to your child (in an age-appropriate manner) why you are doing what you are doing, don't do it. Behave as you want your kids to when they are your age.

6. When you're out, be out. Make sure you are confident in your child care arrangements so you don't worry about your child when you are out. Check in with the sitter one time in an evening, for a few minutes, and then relax and enjoy yourself.

7. Don't give in to pressure. Decide what kind of relationship you want to have, and don't let him/her, your kids, your family, your friends, or anyone else pressure you into doing something that's not right for you.

8. Leave when it's time. One of the more stressful times in a single parent's life is splitting up with someone his kids care about. Change and loss are part of life, things everyone has to deal with. Don't stay in a bad relationship just because your kids like him/her.

10. Expect your child to act out. Sometimes kids act out around a new partner, because they are used to having you to themselves. Acknowledge and accept kids' feelings. Say, "I love you as much as ever, but I like to spend time with my friends, just like you do." Don't let your kids control you—or try and force them to like the new man/woman, either.