

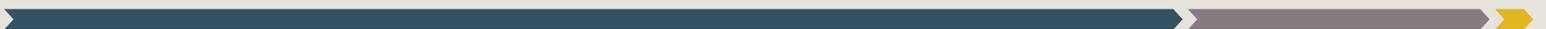


# Love After Divorce

## WORKSHEET

Introducing (or Meeting) a New Partner when  
Kids are in the Picture

*hello* divorce.



# Love After Divorce Worksheet

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## Introducing (or Meeting) a New Partner when Kids are in the Picture

After the dust settles from your divorce, you and your ex will one day both find yourselves ready to date other people. And when that happens, there will come a point when you're ready to introduce your new partner to your kids.

Every family is different, but in a co-parenting relationship, it's typically a good idea to introduce your new partner to your ex before you introduce them to the kids. Doing this thoughtfully, and in a way that is empathetic – especially to an ex who might be surprised or hurt when they learn you're moving forward – will save a lot of heartache and make things easier on your new relationship and on your kids in the long run.

Our worksheet will help you prepare for this meeting, while considering the potential concerns of your ex. And if you're the person meeting your ex's new partner, read on – we've got some tips for you, too.

**CLICK HERE** for everything you need to know about kids and divorce.

**If you are the one making the introduction to your new significant other:**

### Before planning any kind of introduction, be honest with yourself:

- Is my new partner *ready* to meet my ex? Or am I the only one pushing this forward?
- Is this relationship established enough to stay on solid footing if the introduction goes south?
- How will I react and respond if my ex does not handle the introduction well?

### It will be important to reassure your ex that:

- Your new partner has only the best interests in mind for your kids.
- Your new partner is an *addition* to the loving care your children receive from you and your ex – not a replacement.
- You are committed to maintaining the status quo when it comes to your existing co-parenting relationship. Agreements regarding education, health decisions, discipline, travel with the kids, etc. still stand – and your new partner is committed to this, too.
- You intend to introduce your new partner to your child(ren), and you want your ex's input on the best way to handle that – with the kids' best interests at heart.

Now, on to planning that meeting.

HelloDivorce offers Legal Coaching to help make the process hassle free and affordable. **CLICK HERE** for a Free Strategy Session.

## Day & Time

Knowing what you know about your ex, what's the best time of week to catch them when their head is clearest, and when they're in the best mood? Can a morning coffee work? An invite to your house while the kids are at an activity? A lunch meeting in a public location? A drink after work?

Day of the week: \_\_\_\_\_ Time of day: \_\_\_\_\_

Activity: \_\_\_\_\_

## Setting the Scene

What can you do to make your ex feel as comfortable as possible, and to avoid making them feel like the situation is two vs one? (Remember: a thoughtfully planned meeting designed to put them at ease is in your interest and in your kids' best interest.) Check all that apply:

- Share your ex's interests with your new partner.** Favorite sports teams? Favorite hobbies, authors or places they've visited/lived? A few background details will help your new partner establish some common ground with your ex to establish rapport at the beginning of the conversation.
- Think about seating.** Can you sit at a round or square table, rather than a booth, to avoid the situation feeling like it's 2 vs 1?
- Think about noise level.** Are you meeting in a quiet bar? Or a bustling coffee shop? Think about the noise level of the places you suggest for a meet-up; if it's so quiet everyone in the establishment can listen in, or too loud that lip reading is required, things will be a lot more awkward.
- Ask your ex to think in advance about their preferences for sharing the news with the kids.** Or, send them this worksheet. The goal is for this to be a productive meeting, and that can only happen if everyone comes prepared to share their wishes, demands, and preferences. By asking your ex to think about what information they'd like to know, what information they'd like to share, and how they prefer the kids meet your partner, you'll help your ex to be as prepared as possible – and reduce confusion and potential hostility along the way.
- Lead with a laugh.** Is there something funny you or your new partner can say to start the conversation? A self-deprecating joke? A funny story from you about the kids that you haven't shared with either your ex or your

new significant other yet? (Tip: Research has shown that self-deprecating humor is associated with likability and trustworthiness. Share that with your new partner!)

- **Have a plan to follow up.** At the end of the conversation, how can you wrap things up? Is there an event involving the kids that you can remind them to join you for? Did one of the kids pass on a message to share, or a request for a FaceTime that night? Will you, your ex and your partner regroup to talk to the kids together at any point? Be prepared to wrap things up with a plan in place.

### Communicate Next Steps

What do you want to see happen as a result of this meeting? How can you communicate that effectively?

More than anything, I want the kids to know that \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I would really like your help in communicating that my new partner's role in their lives is to \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I'd also love your help in reinforcing to the kids that these   #   things won't change:

○ \_\_\_\_\_

○ \_\_\_\_\_

○ \_\_\_\_\_

○ \_\_\_\_\_

I'm hoping that the relationship between the three of us will \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ is the next step I'd like to take after we leave here today. Are you on board with that?

## Reinforcing Boundaries

Introducing your new partner to your ex might be stressful, but it had a purpose: to get everyone on the same page about how you'll introduce your partner to your kids, and to get clarity on how you'll communicate the role of your new partner to your kids.

Now it's time to make sure the plan stays on track:

- **Debrief with your significant other.** Without your ex present, make sure they felt comfortable with everything discussed. Give them the chance to ask questions, vent, or share thoughts that didn't come up during the conversation with your ex. Listen and make sure they feel heard, and that they feel as much a part of the co-parenting team as you, your ex and they want to be.
- **Follow up with your ex.** Send a nice note. Or if the conversation didn't go well, just send a note. Put a cap on the meeting by thanking them for making the time and for being honest with their thoughts and perspective. Reiterate the next steps you agreed to in person, and send calendar invites if any in-person follow-up conversations with the kids were agreed to.

### If you are being introduced to your ex's new partner:

Your goal with this meeting is to voice requests and concerns you may have about your ex's new partner and how they will be introduced to, and interact with your kids. This might not be an easy meeting. But remember that this isn't about your ex getting your approval of their new partner: this is about your kids. Your kids and *their* well-being.

#### Before the meeting

It will be important for you to spend some time prioritizing before this conversation. Setting clear expectations and boundaries up front can set this new phase of co-parenting off on the best foot possible. Here are a few things to think about:

- **What role do you see for yourself, and for your ex's new partner when it comes to interacting with the children?** What are your thoughts on discipline? Rewards? Transporting the kids to various activities? First impressions are important, and this is a key opportunity to express what you want up front, before any issues or misunderstandings arise.

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- **In what ways do you want your ex’s new partner to engage with your kids?** Remember – now that they are being brought into the picture, they’ll have some kind of role in your kids’ lives. If you can think of meaningful ways this new partner can contribute to the new family dynamic and share that during this meeting, you’ll help them fit in in the best way possible, and you’ll help avoid conflict.

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- **In your view, what’s the best way to talk to the kids about this new person in their lives?** How do you want the kids to learn about or meet this person? What do you plan to say to the kids if they ask you questions about this new partner? This meeting is an opportunity to align on talking points so everyone is on the same page.

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- **What are you afraid of?** Honesty and vulnerability are powerful things. If you can be honest and thoughtful in expressing any fears or concerns you have about how the kids will react to having or adjusting to another key figure in their lives, you could help the new partner understand your perspective – and your kids – a bit better.

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- **What is *good* about this new arrangement?** Push yourself to come up with at least one positive thing about your ex’s new partner being in the picture and communicate that in person during this meeting. It will go such a long way in making people feel comfortable, seen and respected. Now, on to planning that meeting.

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## Following Up / Reinforcing Boundaries

After the meeting, there are actions you can take to ensure agreements stay in place:

- **Thank your ex and their new partner.** Send a quick email just to say thanks for the meeting, and that you appreciate having the chance to talk before involving the kids. You can keep it short – one or two sentences, even – but this simple action will a) clear the air if the meeting ended on a stressful note and b) give you a chance to reinforce that you're ready to move forward with the plan you agreed to.
- **Write down agreements that were made. Tuck it away and revisit it in a month.** What was agreed to during the meeting? Write it down while it's fresh. Maybe even in a Google doc or in an email to yourself, so it's timestamped. Revisit it again in a month or so. If the plan is working – great! If not, this is a good chance to reconnect with your ex to course correct before things veer too far from the plan.
- **Check in with your kids.** After your kids meet your ex's new partner, check in with your kids. Be mindful that they may be nervous about a new figure in their lives. Remind them that you'll always be their parent, and so will your ex. This new figure is a "bonus" parent – an extra person to love and care for them. Say something nice about the new partner to reinforce to your kids that this family expansion is a good thing.

### If you are the new partner:

Remember: as stressed and worried as you might be about meeting your partner's ex, they are probably a *hundred* times more stressed and worried. To them, this meeting might feel a bit like ganging up; it's two vs. one, after all. Supporting your partner, while staying somewhat neutral, will be your challenge. You're there to discuss your new place in *their* kids' lives. You're going to be an important figure for the kids moving forward, but today, the birth parents get to call the shots.

Depending on how the marriage ended, your partner's ex may still be hurt or jealous of your relationship. Empathize with how hard it may be for them to meet you face to face. Or, they might be elated that their ex has (also) found a new partner. Regardless of their feelings toward you, or their ex, the focus of this meeting needs to be on the kids. And you can help keep it that way.

### Before You Go:

Think about what you want to get out of this meeting. How involved are you planning to be in the kids' lives? Will you be living with your partner, or simply coming and going regularly? What clarifications will help you understand your new role in the family dynamic?

Potential questions you may want to consider in advance and bring up at the meeting, include:

- How do you think the kids will react to this news? In your view, what's the best way for me to reinforce that I'm an addition to the dynamic, not a replacement?
- What do you think the kids will be most concerned about? What can I do to ease the transition? Do you think they'd like me to give them their space, or is it better for me to engage them when I'm around them?
- If my partner needs to leave home for a few hours, or a few days, would you like first right of refusal before I'm left alone with them?
- I'd like to help share the load and drive the kids to \_\_\_\_\_. Are you comfortable with that?
- If I'm with the kids and one of them acts out or does something wrong, how would you like me to handle it? Should I step in, or save discipline for my partner?
- I understand you two are using \_\_\_\_\_ as a co-parenting tool. Do you think it makes sense for me to download that app and share calendars with you?
- I'm planning to share responsibilities in the household when it comes to *(paying for things, doing certain chores, making repairs or design changes, etc.)*

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Is there anything you prefer I *not* do or pay for? For example – what are your thoughts on gifts, clothing, or groceries the kids might request?

- How do you feel about vacations? As long as you know and approve in advance, are you comfortable with me and my partner taking the kids on vacations? By car? By plane?

### At the Meeting: Listen, Learn and Refocus

- **Listen with open ears.** You've likely only "known" your partner's ex through your partner's eyes. Use this conversation as an opportunity to put yourself in their ex's shoes, to understand their perspective and their motivations for certain actions or demands.
- **Truly work to understand their concerns.** Your partner's ex may be worried that you're going to be a replacement parent. Let them know that is not the way you feel; as this next chapter progresses, you'll be a bonus parent. And, you're a team player, you're not planning to go rogue.

- **Respect their opinion.** If the ex has strong feelings about how the kids are told, or about your role in decision-making, discipline, attending the kids' events, now is not the time to fight back. Now is the time to hear them, try to understand where they're coming from, and make thoughtful alternative suggestions for their consideration.
- **Refocus, if necessary.** If things get contentious or veer too far off course, you can help pull people back. You can intervene and refocus the conversation with a simple, "Guys, I know that emotions are still running high. But I think we can all agree that we're here because we care about the kids and want them to move through this transition as easily as possible. And I really want to make sure I understand my role in this new dynamic. I don't want to step on toes. Can we go back to X?"

### After the Meeting:

- **Support your partner.** How did they feel the conversation went? Let them know (honestly) how you felt the conversation went. Discuss whether there needs to be any follow up with the ex, and what the next steps are for moving forward from here.
- **Keep comments about their ex to yourself.** It might be soooooo tempting, but don't take the bait. No comments or judgy observations about their ex, period. They don't need you to remind them that that person wasn't the right fit. And you don't need to fan the flames and undo any part of that calm, mature conversation you just had. If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all.
- **Be prepared for backlash.** Since you, your partner and their ex have all talked through the best way for you to meet the kids, this probably won't happen – but it's good to be prepared, just in case. Kids go through a lot during the divorce process, all of it outside their control. You are another thing outside their control. It might take some time for them to get used to you being in the picture. Don't push a relationship; give them the time and space they need to get to know you.