

New Partner Etiquette

For step-parents, new partners — and for parents who have moved on. The child stays the centre of the universe.

A child has a mother and a father, and they are loved. The new partner is a friend within the boundary and rules set by the primary caregiver. If you are able, be an amicable, kind adult in the child's life — but never try to replace the other parent. That is not your job.

For the new partner

- The child has a mother and a father. You are not a third parent. You are a friend, a kind adult, a presence — within the boundary set by the primary caregiver.
- Take your tone from the primary caregiver. Their house, their rules, their pace.
- Do not push to be called 'Mum' or 'Dad'. The child decides what to call you, in their own time, if at all. 'Auntie', 'Uncle', or your first name are gifts, not lesser names.
- Never speak ill of the other parent in front of the child — not even in jokes, sighs or eye-rolls. Children hear everything.
- Do not discipline the child in the early stage. That stays with the parent. You support; you do not lead.
- If you have children with this new partner, that does NOT give you rights over the partner's existing children — and it does NOT lessen the existing child's place in their parent's heart. A child, biological or adopted, is a lifetime commitment, not a contract that can be dissolved at will.
- Do not move into the children's nesting home. Do not stay overnight in it. That boundary protects the child's sense of one safe place.
- Birthdays, school plays, parents' evenings, faith festivals — step back unless the child explicitly invites you. Your absence on these days is a kindness.
- If the child confides in you, your first response is: 'Have you told your Mum / your Dad?' You are a bridge, not a wall.
- If the relationship with your partner ends, the child still mattered. A short, kind goodbye matters. Children remember disappearances.

For the parent who has moved on

You still have a child. That child is still the centre of your universe. Other children — new partner's children, future children — cannot and will not replace them. Children often feel replaced when their parent finds a new partner. It is a delicate balance. Show it in actions, because actions are what children feel.

- Tell your child clearly, more than once: 'You will always be a part of my heart and soul. Nothing and no one changes that.'
- Show it. Make a point of attending school events, hospital visits, parents' evenings WITHOUT the new partner — so the attention stays with the child.
- If the new partner does attend, the attention is still on the child. A new relationship is not a thing to show off in front of a child who is grieving the old family shape.
- Carve out one-to-one time every week with the child. Same day, same activity if possible. Predictability is love.
- Do not introduce the new partner until you and the other parent have spoken. The other parent hears it from you, not from a sibling, a school friend, or social media.
- When you do introduce, use plain words: 'This is my friend Sara. She is not your Mum. Your Mum is your Mum.'
- Wait. Most child psychologists suggest at least 6–12 months of stable relationship before a new partner meets the child, and longer before they sleep over.
- Never compare the child to the new partner's children. Never say 'the others don't behave like this.' Children hear it for life.
- If a new baby arrives, the existing children get more of you, not less, in the first months. They are watching for proof they still matter.
- Honour the other parent in your home. A photo of Mum on the child's bedside is not a betrayal of your new partner — it is honesty about where the child came from.
- If you have re-partnered with someone of a different faith or culture, the child's faith identity from their original home is protected, not negotiated.

For the primary caregiver setting the boundary

- You are allowed to set the rules for who is around your children, when, and how.
- You are allowed to say no to overnight stays, sleepovers and introductions until you are ready.
- You are allowed to ask the new partner not to attend certain events.
- You are allowed to change your mind as the child grows and tells you what they need.
- Write the boundary down once, calmly. Share it with both households. Review it every 6 months.

The line that holds: a child, biological or adopted, is a lifetime commitment — not a contract that can be dissolved at will. Whether you stayed, left, or were left — the child stays yours.

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