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# Entertainment

DATING - WITH CHILDREN

## Single parents must juggle their desire for a social life with the demands of raising kids

BY PAT BURSON

Newsday Staff Writer

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Michelle Mullany watches some single men's expressions go from Hey, baby, to See ya 'round, lady, when she tells them she is a single mother.

"I've been in restaurants and bars and the conversation is flowing and going great. Then it comes up that I have a son," says Mullany, 32, a never-married trauma therapist and former Marine who lives in Cobble Hill with her 9-year-old son, Steven Sheppard. "I've had guys just literally turn around."



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articles about single parenting for About.com.

"There's two forms of readiness," she says. "There's ready for the social life, which dating is a part of. Then there's the ready-to-think-about-something-serious."

Don't permit loneliness to push you into a relationship you're really not interested in pursuing long-term, she says. "Know what kind of relationship you're looking for."

David Feete of Greenlawn, an information technologies consultant who is raising a 12-year-old son and a 5-year-old daughter, realizes now that he might have jumped into a serious relationship too quickly while waiting for his 2005 divorce to become final.

"We went out for a couple of years, and she became very close to my kids," he says of the woman, but "we ended up breaking up," recalls Feete, 35.

"It's hard because I'm pressed for time with work and spending time with them and trying to date. She became a big part of my life quickly," he says. "If I had to do it all over again, I would have waited."

Now when he meets a woman, he leaves his kids out of the mix. "Since I broke up with my girlfriend, it's a don't-ask, don't-tell situation," he says. "Unless something permanent comes up,

I'm not going to intertwine my children with another relationship."

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Mullany says she's learned not to take it as a rejection of her or her son. "I really had to pause and say it's not that, but that they weren't ready," she says. "Some may think that I want to get married quickly or that I'm trying to find a father for my son. It doesn't necessarily mean any of those things. What it does mean is that I have different responsibilities. No more, no less."

That's just one of the challenges Mullany and other single parents face while trying to balance their desire for a social life - and maybe more - with the demands of raising children.

If you're a single parent who has been widowed, divorced or never married, relationship experts and other single parents recommend you take your time, take care of yourself and take care with your children.

If you've been out of the dating pool for a while, first decide whether you're ready to dive back in.

"There are ways to know if you're ready or need more time," says Jennifer Wolf, a parent coach from Grandville, Mich., who writes

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## Be careful for your kids

Introducing the new person in your life too soon is a common mistake single-parent daters make, says dating expert Jeff Cohen of Ridgewood, N.J., who writes a relationship column for YahooPersonals.com.

"Going on a first date and bringing them home to the kids? You do that a few too many times, and your kids won't believe you when you say it's a serious relationship because they see so many different partners walking through the door," he says.

Like Feete, most single parents don't have a lot of time to date. With the demands of work, as a project manager for New York City, and raising her 4-year-old adopted daughter Irina, Naomi

Nissen has turned to the Internet in hopes of finding a potential mate - and a father for her child. But she admits to having mixed results.

"I've gone from one online dating service to another," said the "over-40" Nissen, of Kensington, near Park Slope. "One of them really brought up mostly the dregs."

But another brought up "very decent, kind men," and "a lot of guys are actually interested," she adds. "Some men are very glad to see you being the mother because they want to see what kind of mother you are. Some of them are glad I adopted and that there's no ex in the picture, and it's also something they admire. Of course, it doesn't mean we'll get along."

Once you're clear about whether you're ready and what you want in a relationship, one of the next questions is, when should you tell the kids that Mom or Dad is planning to start dating?

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