

Single Dad Seeks: Dating Again After Divorce

Single Dad Seeks: Dating Again After Divorce

Advice and strategies on learning to find
authentic love.

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Introduction

This dad explains it all to you. Likes, dislikes, hopes, fears. He's going to share with you his strategy for finding a "next" mate. What he wants you to know about his ex-wife and his kids. While his kids may always come first, the divorced dad needs to make room and intimacy available to a new woman if he wants to find a mate. This divorced dad knows how to express himself, and through his six years post-divorce, he's been through a lot of dates and a couple of longer-term relationships. In *Single Dad Seeks*, John tries to unravel the mysteries of online dating, relating to women, and keeping his parenting priorities straight in the chaos of love's challenges.

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Dads Are Different

A man's divorce defines his path in life. His kids are a priority, but you need to be a priority, too. What's hard about going out with a dad? Let's explore what makes him a dad, and what things are important to consider if you want a long-term relationship with him.

1.

Burn the Maps! Do You Think You Know About Dating After Divorce?

We are all trying to figure things out. I'm working to figure myself out (wants, desires, depressions, ecstasies), to figure out my divorce (what happened, how to get over it, and how to move on in a healthy way), to figure out single parenting as a dad and, ultimately, where we find ourselves (me) today, dating and the mechanics of desire, relationship, coupling, or not coupling. And this much is clear: I have no idea what I'm talking about.

It's like trying to write about being a parent if you have never had kids. Or imagining what it will be like when you're married, before you've ever experienced it. And I believe I'm on a similar precipice. I THINK I want the next relationship. But it's only because that's what I know, that's what I think I'm comfortable with. "I'm good in relationship," I like to say to myself. I'm looking for that again.

But am I? Or is it just what's familiar? I was married the first time for seven years. Then single and sad for a couple of years and married again for eleven years. So since I was 27 years old, I've spent most of my time married. So I kinda know what that was like. Both experiences were eye-opening and transformational. And it's my natural tendency to want to get back in that couple mode again. At least I think so.

As I am embarking on this more recent path of discovering myself in dating mode, I'm not sure I have all the information or

tools. I certainly don't know what my optimal date would look like, though I'm trying to construct maps. I'm doing my reading, planning, and sketching things and trying to figure it out. But the real answer is this: there is no figuring it out.

I simply don't know. And all the blog posts and thoughts leading up to this moment, this awareness, are theoretical meanderings of a man who thinks he wants to be back in a "relationship." And they are all lies. Because I can't know. I can't imagine. I am trying to write the symphony to the next love of my life without having met her. How do I know where to begin? How can I dream her up, if she's not revealed herself to me? Quite simply, I can't.

Here's what I can do.

Pause. Relax. Enjoy the process. There is no hurry. Really. Get this. There. Is. No. Hurry.

And I can keep imagining my treasure maps, but I have to be willing to be swept away by the unknown and unexplainable. I think that's what love is. OH BOY, I used the L word. When and how does *that* come into it?

What I do know is this. Present-moment exploration is the only way to go. Present-moment conversations and discussions. Present-moment dating. Present-moment sex, if it presents itself. ANNNNDDDD STOP. That's it. Stop. Stay with the "touch" part. Stay with the conversation about current events. Stay with the fascination about the person in front of you and not the idea you have.

I do a lot of projecting. And often that projection process is misleading both to myself and the potential date. I write love poems. Occasionally those love poems are inspired by actual events in my life, a kiss, a missed opportunity, a chance meeting with an old flame. But they are no more real than my maps of the "next relationship" or finding "The ONE." Bunk. All bunk.

And yet, all very useful in self-revelation. I AM learning more about my desires. I am learning how to deconstruct my wants and desires and see which ones serve me and which ones I can leave behind. I've learned some really valuable lessons along the way, but they are not maps, they are notes.

I've learned that much of the programming I received about beauty came from pornographic magazines. But even when I was 10, I was reading *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Sex, but Were Afraid to Ask*, so I've been studying women and sex and pleasure for a while.

I've broken the idea, for myself, that youth is beauty. And what I've discovered is youth is more about the animal need to procreate and breed with the most attractive and available woman. And get this, women in their 20s who are uber-fit and good looking will appear to be perfect mates, to my reptilian brain. And yet, I'm not interested in procreation, or having sex with 20-year-olds or really even 30-year-olds.

I've learned that the spark comes from the eyes, the smile, and the intelligence inside. If there is joy, it usually shows through the eyes. And if there's deep intelligence, I find I'm more turned on than any physical attribute. Except of course the smile. And the joy.

I've learned that dating after divorce is different. We are much different than we were "back in the day." Our parameters and needs are very different. And our boundaries and priorities are very different as well. AND we won't put up with much bullshit before we call a foul and move on.

I've learned that the real sparks are very hard to find. And valuing that connection is often more important than any idea or roadmap I've ever made up.

Finally, I've learned that working on myself is the best strategy for finding who's "next" for me. And that includes this

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writing (self-examination), exercise (health and self-care), and putting myself out there as “available.”

I don't like first dates, but they are a necessary evil if you are going to date. (What does that word even mean? *Date*?) And I don't like online dating. But I find it another necessary evil, like looking for a needle in a haystack. Looking for the spark to set the haystack on fire.

And really that's what I'm looking for, the fire. To feel the burn and intoxication again. This time with some tethers to the ground (and sobriety of my past experiences). But for the fire to come and burn my maps, I have to start with the spark. And since I've only seen a few sparks in the last four years, I know the journey ahead may be longer than I want. (I guess it already has been.)

And, here I will repeat myself again. I am excited and terrified about the transformation that will occur when SHE shows up. And yet I am pushing towards her, calling her in, writing love poems to HER.

I can only imagine... And for now that's all I've got. And these maps, which I will gladly set alight in her flame.

2.

What a Single Dad Wants in the Next Relationship

Let's Hook Up. Wait. I mean, Let's Go Out On A Date... We've both got some history under our belt, kids, and some requirements for what's okay and what we simply won't ever do again. (Red flags, we like to call them.) As we navigate dating again, we quickly realize the rules are very different. Our experience gives us some distinct advantages in terms of recognizing what we don't want. And perhaps our unfinished wounding might keep us from starting the dating process again.

Rules for dating a single dad

I've got two kids and a full-time job, but I'd still like to find time to be with someone.

1. Let's not rush into things.

I will admit that getting back out there, for me, as a man, initially was about sex. Today, I think sex can get in the way of learning if you like the person. And if you're going to do more than lie around in bed with this person, you might want to go easy on the seduction moves at first. Get to know if you like talking to, as well as looking at, your potential partner. I don't have any hard rules on this. But if you slow the drive to the bedroom,

you might avoid getting mixed up in something purely physical. It can blur your vision when trying to figure out if you want to hang with this person for the long run.

2. I'm looking for 100% pure connection.

Half my life is behind me. I have two beautiful kids. And I'm happy with myself, just as I am. (I'd like to keep getting fitter, but my joy is genuine.) In several online dates I found myself sitting across the table from very attractive, usually younger, women who had nearly nothing in common with me. I could see myself eyeing their bodies and trying to imagine the sex, but I stopped myself, pretty quickly, even with the fantasizing. It takes a lot to get to a second date with me. Today, I'm even getting pretty stingy with first dates. I don't want a "date." I don't want nice. I want my next relationship to start out with the potential to go the long distance. I've never been a casual dater.

3. I'm into moms.

If my date doesn't have kids, she probably won't have much in common with me. At our age, kids are either a choice you made or one you didn't. And nothing against the non-parents in the group, but I'm so wrapped up with my kids that if you don't have that same passion and joy, we're probably going to have to look for things to have engaging conversations about. If you have kids, we've got an immediate starting point for everything. Trying to talk about your kids with a woman who's not a mom... Well, they just don't get it.

4. Let's be clear about this.

Games of any kind are an immediate time out. Passive aggressive might have worked in some other decade, but as adults, we should've gotten that silliness out of the way. One thing I will tell a first date, "You can ask me anything. In fact, I prefer the hard questions. I'm trying to learn the answers myself. I will always try to answer honestly." The first relationship I've had since my divorce went right for it. We went through the whole process, getting to know each other, dating, breaking up, without any drama. None. We're still friends. That's how it needs to be. Let's do without all the crazy stuff.

5. Brutally honest

If it's not a fit on the first date, I'm going to try to let you know gently and quickly that it wasn't a fit. I think initial attraction is something we can't really control or completely predict, but I also don't think we can do without it.

I have created a dog metaphor to help me explain what I'm talking about. And I usually share this concept on the first date. (Hmm. Maybe this explains a lack of second dates.) Here it is. Two dogs meet up in a park. One of three things happens: both tails are wagging, one tail is wagging, or neither tail is wagging. It's as simple as that. I was born with a Boston terrier's body. I can be several different sizes of Boston terrier, but if you're into whippets and poodles, we're probably never going to be a match. And there's no accounting for taste. I think some of this is hardwired.

6. The spark is only a start.

If the chemistry (tail wag) is ON, there are still a ton of steps along the path before we're in a relationship. We need to have intellectual compatibility. (If I'm a reader and you're a reality TV junkie, we might not go the distance.) We need to synchronize our schedules over time. Kids, work, and all the other stuff we're just remembering we love to do have to be the priority. It may take several months to get in our first four dates, but... Like I said earlier, we shouldn't be in a hurry. And then we've got all the negotiations about how and when we want to see each other. (Let's not start with jumping in bed or looking at vacation calendars for a while. Okay?)

7. Fearless commitment to monogamy

At first, divorce may seem like we've gotten the key to the kingdom of sex again. It's not that easy. If that IS what you are looking for, go for it. I won't be in your queue. If we do decide to sleep together, I want to know that we've just become mutually exclusive. That might be a stretch if you're playing the field or not sure about what you want. It's not difficult for me. By the time we get past first base, I'm letting you know that I am into you. And if you want to go further, we've got to establish some mutual objectives. (If we're about to sleep together, I can assure you we've had this conversation.)

8. Feeling the feelings

Men are often accused of not feeling their feelings. Feelings can be scary for both men and women. But as we begin navigating our time together, we've got to be able to talk about whatever

we're feeling. The beauty of that is feelings include the ability to fully love. So when opportunity arises, I look forward to being 100% present with my feelings. There might have been a disconnect on those terms in my previous marriage. But I'm a learning individual. I know that I feel deeply, and I enjoy being expressive of those feelings. If feelings scare you, that might be something for you to look at. Feelings are the key to compatibility, in my opinion.

9. Dating women my age

Yes, I selected some potential younger dates and knew their age and also that they had not had children. I learned as a result of these mistakes. It's pretty telling for both men and women when their profile says they are 50 and they want to date partners who are 30-40. I'm not that guy. I'm pretty clear about wanting a woman who's experienced a lot of the world. And in that model they've probably had kids and are generally within five years of my age, on either side. My first girlfriend post-divorce was a couple of years older.

10. Who pays, who is the predator, and who's demanding sex?

Many things are wrong in the relationships between men and women. I am not an apologist for the cultural norms that have stacked the deck against those of us who are trying to elevate the discussion about it all. And I think our culture's focus on youth is way off base. Someone commented on my blog that porn was to blame, but

I'm not sure porn is any more the driver than the Miley-Cyrus-type circus of celebrity and mainstream media. Our culture feeds on extremism. And it has an effect on all of us, adults and teenagers.

The discussion I am hoping to facilitate is the antithesis of these issues. That's why I am trying to come out with my individual perspective that seems to be different from the experiences you've had. We learn. We evolve. Or we don't. I am hoping to get better, clearer, and more honest with each attempt at being in a relationship. We (men and women) need to have more frank discussions about desire, sexual preferences, and how we want to relate to each other in and out of the bedroom.

I look forward to having another opportunity to learn about myself "in relationship" at some point. I'm happy and patient right where I am. But I believe by having my priorities clear and articulated, I can do a better job of finding and sorting through the process of finding that NEXT RELATIONSHIP. I wait enthusiastically.

3.

Further Explorations of What a Single Dad Still Wants (Nine Months Later)

Don't kill the heat by worrying about the fire damage.

One of the things I've learned thus far is never assume you have it figured out. This list has come back to bite me on more than one occasion. Sure, I'm okay with being a single-parent blogger and getting into the dating/relationship space, just a bit. And I'm okay with telling you I write about stuff, and I might even write about our relationship, should we hit it off.

Well, let me tell you how my last three months have gone. We hit it off, sort of. We hit some parts of relating in spades and other parts, not so much. Here are a few more points that I've learned in the course of dating another single parent for three-plus months.

1. Long-term relationship or bust

Saying that I'm only interested in a long-term relationship, or marriage, is not very accurate. This was the first issue that freaked this woman out. She politely said, "We've got a lot of heat, but I don't think I want the same things you want. I'm not looking to get married again. Ever. So if that's your goal, you'd best keep looking."

But...

There was no argument. However, we were both sad when our chemistry and joy were absent again from our lives. She texted later, “do you want to hit.” We were tennis buddies. And what unfolded from that “date” was an agreement that we would stay in the present and not get too far ahead of ourselves. Starting a relationship and having a Relationship are two different things. Couldn’t we just enjoy our present moment together? Sure, let’s try that.

I have had to recant my declaration of long-term quite a number of times. I know what I want is a long-term relationship. Not a question for me. The question is, what does that look like? That’s the sticky wicket.

2. If you stay present, you won’t get scared.

It’s the future that gives my friend the freak-out posture. The best case scenario, even in her mind, is a bit diffuse. And it is also pretty abstract when I start thinking about next year, or two years from now. I’d like to still be involved with this highly intelligent woman, whom I completely dig on all burners, but who knows... Right. Who knows? Certainly we don’t know. We’re just starting out. But that’s our pattern and our fear that comes into our minds when we start mapping out too far in advance. And, in all fairness, it’s not necessary. NOW is it. Stop with the “what if.”

3. Making it up as we go along

So we don’t really have a word for what we “are.” I don’t like dating, so I’m not dating her. She doesn’t like the idea of a long-term relationship, so we’re not doing that either. Do we need an easy handle on what we are forming between us? No. Is it more

convenient if you are able to say “my boyfriend” and “my girlfriend”? Maybe a tad better than my lover or my life-mate. But please, we’re splitting hairs. Do we like to be together? Yes. Are there things we like to do together besides fool around in bed? Yes. Then do that. Do all of that.

4. Hold on loosely.

So she doesn’t want to read my love poems. She doesn’t need to read my blog. I don’t have to get my yayas by getting her to tell me I’m a good writer or a swell poet. I don’t need that reassurance. I’m okay with who and how I am. And she also doesn’t want to hear if I’m still looking for the next relationship, though she wants to be clear that she’s not it. Well, sometimes she’s okay with that. We’re figuring that out, too. What we are, what we will be. Who knows? If I think I know, I’m delusional. I have no idea. What I do know is we have an honest relationship. She’s able to say when she’s pissed off at something I’ve done or written. And I’m able to let her breakup demands roll off my shell until we’re able to meet in person and talk things out. That’s as far as we’ve gotten. And that’s fine.

5. Texting is dangerous and lovely.

The minute there is a misunderstanding on text, stop trying to figure it out or argue it out on text. STOP. Get face-to-face and talk. You cannot read the person’s attitude. You have no idea what is really going on when the text comes across saying, “I’ve gotten some very disturbing news.” Um, what? Just STOP. Trying to answer complaints, answer requests for reassurance, basically answering anything that has an edge to it, is very risky to continue via text. Our average is 1-out-of-10. Just forget about it

and ask for a meeting. “Sweetie, let’s get together and talk about this.” That’s all you need to know.

6. The first three months are not real.

We’re still pushing boundaries, still finding rhythms, still managing two single-parenting schedules to try to find time to be together. The good thing is we ARE trying to get together. We’re both trying. We both make efforts. And that’s enough for now. Just as the long-distance relationship has a tendency to create a honeymoon extension, the single-parent dating cycle is quite gated by our ability to find the time to be together. That’s probably a good thing.

7. All about the kids

In the end, our kids come first. We’ve got to make them the priority. They are dependant on us and our availability. Our adult relationships are not. Your “dating” needs to be able to weather some disappointments. When the kid is sick and the date doesn’t go off as planned, it’s got to be okay. And that goes back to the idea of single parents dating other single parents. We get it. If at some point in the future we decide to blend our family lives more, we’ll have more insight into the inner workings of the other parent-child relationship. Until then, we should butt out off all things kid related. Other than giving their kid priority access to them, obviously.

8. I have no idea.

Where are we going? Why should I really be concerned about not knowing what the future holds in store for me and my special

friend? There are over a hundred things that could upset the apple cart in the next three months. Why spend energy and time trying to figure the future out? Don't. Go read some *Power of Now* (by Eckhart Tolle). Go for a walk alone when your new partner can't make it. In the end, go on about your lives **as if...**

As if the other person is just a "nice to have" and not a "must have." Going that far and putting too many expectations on the future of your relationship are enough pressure to blow it up right there. Don't kill the heat by worrying about the fire damage.

4.

Do You Know What You Want? Dating Strategies

Figuring out what went wrong in your marriage is a big puzzle. I hope you've done some work on your issues before you start looking for your next relationship. We're going to start with the premise that you've solved some of your own issues and identified some of the things that split you apart.

Online dating

While I do think there is value in online dating, I also believe problems are inherent in the social click-me culture. But let's look at what's great about online dating.

1. Browse the available field from the comfort of your home.
2. Put your personal value proposition together (what you have to offer).
3. Put your wants, desires, and dreams out there (what you are looking for).
4. Put what you like to do out there. (On Friday nights enjoying being on the couch or in a night club are two very different trajectories.)
5. It helps you get your image together. (You didn't

post that one you took in the bathroom, right?)

6. You can learn what parts of your profile people are picking up on. Because you'll ask them on the date.

7. Try some dates. Learn what you like and don't like about dating.

8. Low commitment of time is required to get a date lined up.

9. Flirting online is fun.

10. Seeing all the potentials is inspiring.

Offline dating

The goal of online dating is to get to an offline date. Meeting in person is the only way to see if there is chemistry going both ways. Photos are interesting, but they lie. Profiles are interesting, but they are about 50% made up. You've got to go toe-to-toe, face-to-face to understand if you want to date this person.

I found that my efforts online were fun and semi-fruitful (my first relationship after divorce was from Match.com), but they were lacking in the more fundamental aspects of relationships.

1. Do they like to do the things you like to do? (Not just say they do.)

2. Does your heart race when you are near them?

3. Can you pick up the returning vibe when you are with them?

Being with someone should be an energetic experience. Both of you should feel energized after being together. And you can't find that through text messages or emails. And you can't really see what a person looks like from photos. You get their BEST SIDE, but you want ALL SIDES.

Priorities

This is the biggest decision for you to make. What are your must-haves and what are your deal-breakers? And know this, these things will change. Things you thought were must-haves might fall off the list when you meet the right person. A few of my priorities looked like this:

- Must love being active
- Has a positive personality
- Whip smart
- Athletic body shape
- Funny
- A single mom

Then know that your priority list is changeable and re-sortable. And you may change it frequently.

A road map

All of your ideas for the person you are looking for are more like ancient treasure maps than today's GPS-accurate maps. You do need a map, however. This book represents mine.

And then you have to know this. Your map will be burned and charred from adventures. This is not a bad thing, it's part of the process. Your map is an idea of where you want to go.

When the right person shows up, all of your priorities and maps will be blown away. At least that's what you hope for. You need the maps and plans and strategies. But when the right person shows up, you will be amazed how little those things mean.

Get your plan. Try online if you want. Get to offline. And then

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see what fits and what doesn't. You need someone who's willing to fight for the relationship. When you both played that role in your last relationship, you might have found a like-spirited person who will fight for your love, just like you will fight for theirs.

That's my dream, and I'm sticking to it.