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The Girlfriend **By Brette McWhorter Sember**

The girlfriend. She strikes terror in the heart of divorced mothers everywhere. When your ex gets a girlfriend it's challenging enough to deal with your own emotions, but when the girlfriend is suddenly a big part of your child's life, it's hard to know how to react.

If Your Kids Are Ga-Ga About the Girlfriend

If your child likes the girlfriend, you know that at least things aren't completely miserable during visitation. But just because your child is happy doesn't mean you're happy. What do you do if the girlfriend gets too involved with your kids, allows things you wouldn't, and seems to be creating an emotional attachment with your child? The first thing to do is just give the entire situation some time. Girlfriends come and go and this might be over before you can say tramp.

On the other hand, if the girlfriend has some staying power, there are some things you can do. First off, don't talk negatively about her in front of your child. You don't want to position yourself as against the girlfriend. If you have real, solid concerns, the person to talk to is your ex. If your child is not being properly cared for, it's on his head. It can be hard to approach your ex about this without getting confrontational, so you have to stick strictly to the facts and not get caught up in your feelings.

It's also a good idea to make some inroads with the girlfriend herself. Try to be friendly and get to know her. It is possible to develop a relationship with her, and often, if she's a decent person, she can influence the way your ex behaves, so getting to know her is a good way to change his behavior.

Remember that no one can take your place with your child, ever. It's ok for your kids to enjoy someone else's company. It's good for kids to have healthy relationships with other adults. And if your ex ends up marrying her, it will be a good thing that they are developing a friendly relationship. However, don't allow the girlfriend to be in charge of visitation. That is something that you and your ex must negotiate together. It's not her right or place to make arrangements with you.

Another common complaint is that the ex and the girlfriend are too "friendly" in front of the kids. If you get eyewitness reports of adult behavior, there is a problem. Some hugging and kissing is fine, but if they're making out in front of your kids, you need to

say something. Politely but firmly remind your ex of what behavior is appropriate in front of the kids and what is not.

If Your Kids Hate the Girlfriend

What if your kids don't like the girlfriend? Some children feel as if their dad spends too much time focusing on the girlfriend and ignores them. Some feel the girlfriend is mean or doesn't like them. If the girlfriend has her own kids, it can complicate things when your children are expected to take part in this new mixed family. If you feel that your kids' complaints are valid, it is ok to have a talk with your ex and explain that while you don't have a problem with the girlfriend, the kids are having a hard time adjusting. Don't point fingers or suggest the girlfriend is a hussy (even if you think she is). Instead make this about how the kids are feeling and say that you want to think of ways together to help them be more comfortable. Keep your conversation focused on what is best for the kids, and not about your own personal opinions.

No matter what the situation, you have no authority to tell your ex that the girlfriend can't be there during visitation. If there is a serious problem with the kind of supervision that is happening, you have to talk to your lawyer and possibly return to court, but you won't get any support from the court unless you have some solid evidence that your kids are in danger (physically or emotionally) when with the ex and his girlfriend.