

What to Know

The most important relationship in the life of your children is the relationship between you and the mother of your children. How well you along with her affects your children every day. This is true whether you and mom are married to each other or not, living together or not.

Your children look to your relationship with their mom as the blueprint for developing their own relationships. If the relationship is healthy, then your children will have a model for what a healthy relationship looks like. If it isn't healthy, they will have a harder time developing their own healthy relationships.



If you and she are married to each other, keep your relationship strong. If you're struggling in the marriage, seek out programs and other resources, such as counseling, that offer help.

If you and she live together but aren't married, think seriously about marrying her. Children tend to be much healthier physically, emotionally, and socially when they grow up with married parents. Parents who live together are much more likely to break up than are married parents. When parents split up, it's most often the dad who ends up living apart from the children.

If you and she don't live together—and there's no hope of you getting together—do everything you can to support her relationship with your children. You must help her to be the best parent she can be, and she must do the same for you. **Do nothing to harm the relationship between her and your children.** This might be tough at times because of the history between you two. You might not like her or are angry with her. She might also act as a “gatekeeper,” which means that she makes it hard for you to spend time with your children.

No matter how healthy your relationship with her, the “Talking with Mom” topic provides some powerful advice on how to strengthen it.

What Else

Your children learn so many vital things from your relationship with their mom. They learn how important it is that both of you:

- Put your relationship with each other first.
- Support each other.
- Respect each other.
- Trust each other.
- Solve conflicts in healthy ways.
- Show affection towards each other.

If your relationship with their mother isn't healthy, it's okay to seek help. Some dads find it hard to seek help for any problem they have, let alone problems with their relationships. They often think they should be able to solve problems on their own and to not do so is a sign of weakness and failure.

The success of your relationship with your children's mother depends as much on how well you both handle the ups and downs in your relationship as it does on how you feel about each other. If you love each other, know that the love will wax, wane, and evolve. The most successful couples know this fact. They also know that their relationship skills will help them maintain the health of their relationship. The most successful relationships are marked not by the lack of conflict, but on how well couples resolve conflict.

What to Ask

Reflect on each of the questions below. Take your time. Write your answers if you like.

1. How healthy is my relationship with my children's mother?
2. What problems do we have in our relationship? How can we overcome our problems for the sake of our children? Do we need help in addressing the problems?
3. Do I have the skills to create and maintain a healthy relationship with her? Which skills do I need to work on the most?
4. (If you're not married to your children's mother) Should I marry her? Do I want to marry her? Does she want to marry me? Why haven't we gotten married? Have we discussed getting married?

Learn More

Think about these six benefits of marriage.

1. **Healthy Children.** Children who grow up in a home with their two married parents are healthier, on average, than children who grow up in a home in which their parents just live together.
2. **Healthy Marriages Lead to Strong Relationships with Children.** Dads who have good marriages are, on average, more involved in their children's lives than are never married or divorced dads. That's because it's easier for married men to be with their children every day and to nurture them at every stage of growth.
3. **Better Family Finances.** Married couples have twice the money that unmarried couples do. Married men are more likely to save and invest, even when they make the same money as unmarried men. Marriage also comes with tax, inheritance, and Social Security benefits.
4. **A Fuller, Happier Life.** Married men are more likely to say they're happy than are unmarried men. When a man focuses on his wife and children, and not just on himself, it helps him lead a happier life. Married men are less likely to be depressed.
5. **A Long, Healthy Life.** Married men live a longer life, on average, than unmarried men. They're also more likely to stay in shape and seek medical help when they need it. They're less likely to smoke, drink, and use illegal drugs.
6. **More, Better, and Safer Sex.** Married couples say they have more sex than do unmarried couples. Married men say they have **better** sex than do unmarried men. Couples are less likely to be faithful to each other when they're not married. Sex is **less** safe when either of you are unfaithful.