Introduction

Recently, while browsing online, I found an article in which a woman asked a dating expert for advice. This woman had met a divorced man, but felt concerned because he had a young child and an ex-wife—in other words, he had baggage. Not accustomed to dating divorced men with children, she wanted to know what she was getting into. The expert scoffed at this woman’s reticence—sure, the expert said, divorced men have ex-wives, children, and lots of other baggage. But pick your poison, she continued, because never-married men have problems of their own, including a lack of desire to commit or mixed messages about what they want. At least a divorced man can commit, the expert said. I shook my head at what I read, because this “expert” missed the whole point. This woman wanted some advice to prepare her for what to expect, and was told that the realities of a divorced man with a child were no more difficult than those of a never-married man. I completely disagree. Besides, being divorced and laden with baggage does not render a man immune to commitment-phobia or mixed messages.

The truth is, separated and divorced men differ from men who have not been married before. How are they different, you ask? Although every separated or divorced man varies in
Dating the Divorced Man

his circumstances, these men typically have more challenges than never-married men. For starters, these men have a marriage under their belts—and marriages have complexities not seen in most nonmarital relationships. They have ex-wives—and these women can be considerably more influential than an ex-girlfriend. They may also have children, child support and maintenance payments, residual emotional issues, and a host of other challenges. For the single woman, this can be a lot to take on! In this book, I will discuss all the different types of challenges that come with separated and divorced men, and show you how to handle them. You will learn to:

• Detect problems early on—and tackle them.
• Quickly weed out men who will be bad partners.
• Recognize a good partner and create a successful partnership with him.
• Identify problems that “come with the territory” versus those that are unacceptable.
• Evaluate whether marriage to a divorced man is the right choice for you.

You’ll also learn to ask the important questions, such as:

• When is a divorced man ready to date?
• How do you spot a man on the rebound?
• Do his children come first?
• Is it okay for him to spend time with his ex?

Before you dig in, however, there are a few other important things you should know:

This book does not advocate settling. Settling is accepting less than what you really want and need in a relationship. Settling is the enemy of successful relationships,
whether with a divorced man or any man. I will provide tools to help you find a relationship that makes you happy and fulfilled.

This book will not judge you. Despite my high standards for you, I support any decision you make—only you know what’s best for you. My goal is to give you as much information as possible, and then you can make your own informed decision.

This book emphasizes problem-solving. One thing I’ve noticed about some dating and relationship books is that they spend too much time storytelling and not enough time teaching important principles and giving straight-up advice. Stories are important, and I include many stories in this book, but I emphasize identifying problems and fixing them.

This book will not teach you how to “win” him. I will not show you how to catch a divorced man, win over his children, or make his ex-wife happy. I also won’t focus on methods to help him get over his divorce, help him deal with his ex, or otherwise show you how to be a good girlfriend. Why? Because you shouldn’t try to win him—he should try to win you. This book focuses on getting your needs met, and will help you evaluate whether your relationship with him can do that.

This book defines success by happiness, not togetherness. Anyone can tell you how to catch a man. And anyone can tell you how to tenaciously trudge through a difficult relationship. But I want to aim for something more for you: I want you to be happy with your man. If you aren’t happy, what’s the point? Thus, my goal isn’t
to help you make your relationship with your separated or divorced man work no matter what, it’s to make sure you’re happy, even if that means leaving the relationship.

Overall, this book will provide you with plenty of information and advice for dating separated and divorced men. Yes, these men can come with challenges, but you will learn how to identify and handle these challenges like a pro. Then you can achieve the happy, healthy relationship you want!

The World of Separated and Divorced Men

As a psychologist, I have observed, researched, and interviewed numerous separated and divorced men, and the women who date them. And as a woman, I have dated a few of them myself! Because of these experiences, I made several discoveries, such as:

Separated and divorced men are everywhere. In today’s world, nearly every woman will date a separated or divorced man sometime during her single life. With more than 50 percent of marriages ending in divorce, men who were previously unavailable have re-entered the dating pool and now make up nearly 40 percent of available men. In addition, women are waiting longer than ever before to get married, and this increases their chances of meeting a man who has already been married.

Separated and divorced men are dating. Divorce and relationship books have cited research concluding that men, much more than women, are less likely to waste time getting back in the dating game after they become separated. When dealing with the loss of a marriage, men
are more likely to take action and move on with someone new, whereas women tend to talk about their loss and not rush into something new. In addition, men with children have more time to date than do women with children because they typically get less parenting time after divorce. However, this has changed more recently as our legal system has begun to recognize fathers’ rights.

**Separated and divorced men remarry.** According to Sam Margulies, Ph.D., J.D., author of *A Man’s Guide to a Civilized Divorce: How to Divorce with Grace, a Little Class, and a Lot of Common Sense*, not only do most divorced men (more than 75 percent) remarry, they typically do so within a few years of their divorces. Divorced women move at a slower pace, and take longer to remarry. However, second marriages fail at an even higher rate than first marriages, so it’s important to have guidance while dating a divorced man.

**Separated and divorced men come with challenges.** Sure, no man is perfect. However, separated and divorced men differ from their never-married counterparts in some key ways—they often come with challenges that go above and beyond what you will find with the average man. Moreover, many women have never encountered most of these challenges before, and may not know how to handle children, difficult ex-wives, reticent parents, substantial financial obligations to the ex, or his anger, guilt, or unresolved grief. Without sufficient information and guidance, women who date these men often experience difficulties or become unhappy.

**Women often don’t mind a man with children.** Some divorced men have children. Other men have children
even though they’ve never been married. Typically, women are more willing than men to date someone with children. Some time ago, I was eating dinner with my partner at a local restaurant. A man and a woman, both in their thirties, sat at the table next to us. I could overhear some of their conversation, and it didn’t take long to figure out that they were on their first date. They began to discuss more personal things, and he revealed that he had three children. He seemed a little sheepish, as she had no children and had never even been married. Her response to his three children was “That’s cool!” In other words, she seemed totally open to his situation.

Many women are unprepared for the problems that come with these men. Despite the increasing number of separated and divorced men, until now there was very little support and guidance for the women who date these men. If you perused the relationship section of any large bookstore, you would have found many books on relationships and dating, but nothing on dating separated and divorced men. You would also have found books on marriage, including stepparenting, stepmothering, and being a “second wife”—yet nearly every problem faced by women married to divorced men actually begins during the dating process. The sooner these problems are identified, the greater chance of solving them. Too often, women wind up in bad relationships or marriages with divorced men because they had no guidance on how to spot trouble ahead of time.

In addition, the women who date these men are often given vague or mixed messages. Here’s an example: a dating expert will tell you that when you date a divorced man with children, his children will always come first. You will hear this mantra a dozen times, but these experts never tell you what it means.
Does “his children come first” mean:

- Children have needs that their parents must fulfill?
- Children’s needs are much more important than adult needs?
- Children require lots of time, money, and patience?
- He can’t blow off his child’s soccer game in order to have brunch with you?
- He will never love you as much as he loves his children?

These are very different questions. “The children come first” can mean different things to different people—thus, I will discuss this important concept in this book.

**Many women struggle as stepmothers and “second wives.”** I have observed some painful situations with women who marry divorced men and wind up feeling stressed, misunderstood, ignored, disrespected, or left out. Of course, not all stepmothers and second wives experience these things, but the ones who do suffer. Again, if they’d had guidance before they married, perhaps they could have prevented some of the problems they’re dealing with now.

Here are two stories that illustrate the challenges that a separated or divorced man can bring to the relationship:

 phóng Donna met Peter through a mutual acquaintance. Peter was divorced and had three school-age children. They began dating, their relationship got serious, and Donna eventually moved in with Peter. Then something unexpected happened: Peter’s ex-wife was injured in a serious car accident that took her nearly a year to recover from. Donna became a surrogate mother—she took care of Peter’s children while he was working. When Peter
needed to move for the children’s sake, Donna quit her job and took a lesser job in order to be with him. After three years, Peter gave Donna a ring and talked about getting married. Then Peter changed his mind—he broke up with Donna, told her he didn’t love her anymore, and asked her to move out of his home. The children were heartbroken. And Donna was left with nothing—she’d given it all up to be with Peter.

When Penelope met Jason, they hit it off immediately. They began dating, and developed strong feelings for one another. However, Jason had one flaw: he was still getting divorced. But Jason told Penelope that his divorce would only take three months, and Penelope believed that things would work out for them. Jason’s divorce ended up taking a year. During that year, Penelope was exposed to the hatred of Jason’s ex-wife, the disapproval of his parents, and the dirty details of Jason’s extremely acrimonious divorce. Nobody she knew had ever been through anything like this, so Penelope had to figure things out on her own. At one point, at her wits’ end, Penelope said to her best friend, “How did this happen? I can’t take this anymore.”

If these sound like horror stories to you, you’re right—they are. And, like all the stories in this book, they are true. Both Donna and Penelope met, dated, and fell in love with a separated or divorced man. Neither woman had any idea of what she was getting into. Both were overwhelmed by unfamiliar and unexpected challenges, creating unhappiness and struggle in their lives. Donna and Penelope aren’t alone—many women have struggled with the unfamiliar challenges that come with these men. And that is why I wrote this book. If you want to learn how to prevent painful situations like these, read on!