

Meet Shilpa. Married her classmate against her parents' wishes. The guy turned out to be an alcoholic, violent and abusive ogre, who didn't spare their son either, born a year later. Divorced him 10 years later, went back to her parents with son Anshuman, found herself a job and insulated herself from all distractions, friendships, social interactions, focussing only on her career and her son.

Seven years later, enter Rohit, a widower with two children, and Shilpa develops her first ever bond outside the family since the divorce. When Rohit proposes and Shilpa accepts, there is mayhem at home. No one even had an inkling that she was seeing him – she had been such a recluse. Is this another Vikas? How could she be so selfish not to think of her son? How could she be so ungrateful after all that the family had done for her and her child? How unseemly at this age! There was no way they were going to let one more of her foibles embarrass all of them or ruin Anshuman's life.

READY FOR REDATING?

Before remarrying, divorcees beware.

By Annam Suresh



Sorry, you can't meet Shilpa. And, after the last ugly showdown, she was found hanging in her bedroom.

Could Shilpa have done things differently? Or would it have been easier if Shilpa had been a man and wanted a mother for Anshuman?

If one is planning to give marriage a second try, there are several things one has to keep in mind.

There are a whole lot of people to be handled – the prospective partner, the family, the children. So it makes sense to minimise points of conflict as much as possible

If possible, take an apartment of your own, staying with just your children. It makes for less interference. If that is not possible, don't spring surprises. A Rohit after seven years of living like a hermit must have seemed unreal to Shilpa's family. Were his intentions honourable? Never mind his assurances, would he really be a good daddy to Anshuman, who had already gone through one traumatic phase? Neither the family nor Anshuman had time to know and perhaps like Rohit – which was unfair to both Rohit and the family.

Rule no 1. Don't hang a 'now I am ready for marriage' board up one fine day.

Despite all the surface broad-mindedness in our society, many still consider divorcees or socially active young widows 'available' so make sure that you are not being led along or treated frivolously. If there are no children or family involved, be extra careful. You might just seem that much more 'available' to the prowling wolf.

Make sure all initial meetings are just outings – not dates. Perhaps lunches or dinners in groups. Also keep escape routes handy – if you need to end an outing abruptly. If you can take a friend or family member into confidence, have them call you at the restaurant or mobile. If you do not possess a cellphone and are not sure of the restaurant you are planning to go to, just say

you have to return a call since you couldn't take it earlier. Whatever it is, make sure you can leave when you want to, if the going gets uncomfortable. Which is why lunches are better than dinners. Then you are not dependent on him to drop you off if it is late, thus having to put up with unwelcome behaviour.

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all about yourself right away. You may never want to see him again and you will regret baring all so early. However, if a friendship does develop and looks like it might lead to something permanent, then do mention your earlier marriage and the family, children, the dog and the parrot, visiting rights, etc.

Get your family, especially your children, familiar with all your friends – of both sexes, not just the special ones. Remember that by the time the friend has become special to you, considerable time has elapsed. So springing a special friend will invite some resentment "and we didn't even know he or she existed – you never mentioned, or introduced him ever."

Discuss you friends, both men and women, with your children. Often they can sense traits that you may have not noticed. Also, they will not feel abandoned or less important than your friends. Occasionally, include them in your outings.

ALLOW TIME

If you begin to feel a special bonding with a man, ensure that your child too has time to interact with him – after all, he or she too would be compelled to share the man and include him in his or her life. If the person you are seeing has children, ensure that there are enough occasions for all the children to interact with one another and with the other parent as just 'friends'. Being introduced one fine day to 'this nice uncle who is going to be your dad and these are your new sisters' is asking for trouble. The child will instantly resent having a family thrust on him or her unawares, he or she will resent not being consulted on something that concerns him, even if he or she has been longing for a 'real' family. He or she will feel betrayed that you had kept something so important a secret when your child thought he or she was the most important person in your life.

It is only fair that as your child



meets your friends just as you like to know his or hers. Also, it helps develop a bond slowly and steadily with those who are really close to you, especially if there is one special friend.

Remember to have your children sleep in a separate room long before you have your friend sleeping over at your place. It is simply rude and insensitive to the child if you just announce at bedtime, "Will you sleep in the study, baby, since uncle will be sleeping in my room?" Don't be surprised by a tantrum and the she retorts with "This is where I always

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sleep – let uncle sleep in the study." Territorial rights are easily threatened and it can lead to extremely ugly scenes with neither uncle nor baby finally sleeping in your room. While uncle may walk away with a surly goodnight (may be even to rethink the whole proposition), baby will stomp off to the study after banging the door and screaming "you don't love me any more."

Have regular discussions with your children. Never forget that everything you do affects them too, immediately and in the long term. "Are you bringing another daddy home?" will be one of many questions you will encounter, all heavily loaded with meaning. It could mean, "Are you bringing a substitute for my wonderful daddy?" if your child has wonderful memories of his or her father or is in touch with him. Or it could mean, "Are you bringing another abusive, alcoholic, horrible beast who will ruin our lives?" Or it could mean, "Am I not enough? Do you really need another person to make our family complete?"

These have to be weighed and answered carefully and sincerely so the child never feels he or she is suddenly no longer number one in your life. Explain to your child that after what the two of you have been through he or she will always be number one. The new man is not a replacement for the wonderful daddy – no one can be substituted. He is one more person you will be sharing your life with. And he is certainly not going to be another ogre in your life – all daddies are not like that.

The topic becomes even more touchy if the new person is going to be a daddy 'in place' of one that has

died. The child feels the parent has already forgotten the old one and is jumping onto a new partnership. "No one is going to replace my daddy," is one of the arguments you will have to face. Be ready for it. Explain that the late parent would have wanted the child to have two parents and you would only choose someone who can love the child just as much. And the 'late' parent will never be replaced – he still holds that special place but life goes on.

INVOLVE EACH-OTHER

Remember, how maturely you treat relationships will decide how the children handle their own relationships as they grow up. Since they are a vital part of your life, treat them as such – no less, but no more either. Let them not run your life to such an extent that you are left completely overpowered. But also ensure that you are not so bossy that even major decisions that impact their lives so tremendously are done without their prior knowledge.

If family members other than children must be involved because you stay together, give them the opportunity to appreciate your needs and interact with your friend slowly. Perhaps, they will begin to like the person too. But in the end if they don't, there is no cause to panic. You will have to put your and your children's needs on a priority basis and even move out if needed. But in this case, make sure that you are certain of your partner and are not jumping into something in a moment of wild passion or on the rebound. Because, if you have burnt this bridge, there may not be that family to go back to. So ensure that you don't have to. Second times often turn out to be far better than the first round since many of the earlier pitfalls are carefully avoided. So make sure you do it right from the word go – so everybody involved comes out a winner.

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