

Relationships

**HI, CAROLYN:** I'm a proud daddy of two little ones who are 5 and 3. My father abandoned us when my sister and I were that age. I barely remember



**CAROLYN HAX**

him, but it has taken my mom and sister

years of therapy, fights and drama to get over it. I am in the process of separating from my wife and will soon move in with the love of my life. This does not mean I won't be a full-time father to my children, but my sister accuses me of being our father — of leaving my family to find my own happiness. This is inaccurate and unfair, but how do I clear my conscience and ensure that my sister actually is wrong? — Va.

**DEAR VA:** Easy: Don't move in with this "love of my life."

If your marriage is over, then it's over. I'm not going to jump on the guilt wagon and say you have an ironclad obligation to stay in the home you created.

Love and duty do fuse together in the acts of marriage and child-bearing. But the duty is to treat your family's needs as equal to your own, to override destructive impulses, to own your mistakes, and to regard breaking your vows as the last resort when all efforts to sustain a healthy marriage have failed. It is not a duty to feign love where you don't feel any, or stay "for the kids."

When you move in with your new love, however, you're not saying, "My marriage isn't working and it's best for the kids if we raise them in two households." You're saying, "The wife was OK, but this woman's better." Also known as, "I'm leaving my family to find my own happiness."

The only difference between you and your father is that, as a veteran of parental abandonment, you get how wrong it is to abandon your kids in the process, and you're going to remain involved.

It's a huge, character-fueled distinction, but not a redeeming one.

Let's say your marriage really is broken, for reasons entirely unrelated to your falling for someone else. And let's also say your new love — both the person and the relationship — is so healthy that it will actually help you create the kind of stable and loving home you so urgently owe your children.

Both of these conditions would be better served by your putting the brakes on the rush to shack up with Love II. By concentrating on one major upheaval at a time, your separation will go better, the transition for your kids will go better and the progress of your new romance will go better.

Rushing into this new love while still living with the old one means you haven't given yourself any chance to determine if you and she are good together under normal relationship conditions.

For the love of your children, please establish something resembling normal relationship conditions (separation, home for just you and your daughters, custody agreement, divorce, new family equilibrium, pattern of caring civility between you and your ex) before you go butt-over-handlebars into the next big thing.

■ READ CAROLYN HAX EVERY DAY IN THE FREE PRESS. WRITE TO HER CARE OF THE WASHINGTON POST, STYLE PLUS, 1150 15TH ST., NW, WASHINGTON, D.C. 20071 OR E-MAIL TELLME@WASHPOST.COM.

# Post-divorce: A big, happy family

**AUTHOR DRAWS FROM OWN EXPERIENCE TO OFFER ADVICE TO EXES WITH KIDS**

By ERIN HILL PERRY  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Believe it: Karen Buscemi, her husband, her ex-husband and her ex-husband's wife all get along well.

As a team, they've worked through awkward conversations, even easing their kids' upsets — like when Buscemi's oldest son broke down in tears when he learned his mom and stepdad were having a baby.

Buscemi, of Rochester Hills, says that with patience, flexibility and kindness, they're managing their blended family. She has a 13-year-old son from her first marriage and a 3-year-old son from her current marriage. Her ex-husband and his wife have a 10-year-old son from her previous relationship.

In her new book, "I Do, Part 2: How to Survive Divorce, Co-Parent Your Kids, and Blend Your Families Without Losing Your Mind" (NorLight's Press, \$15.95), Buscemi's message is clear to divorced people with children: Do what it takes to make life after divorce better for your children.

"Your kid has to be your first priority, and if that means that you really have to work on you so that your kid can have parents who don't yell at each other and call each other names ... you need to do that," she says.

Buscemi, 41, is the editor of Styleline magazine, published by the Detroit Media Partnership, which handles the business functions of the Detroit Free Press and Detroit News. She and her ex, Andrew Correll, were divorced 10 years ago. Buscemi has been in her current marriage, with Frank Buscemi, for six years. She spoke with

the Free Press about how all sides can get along and be happy.

**QUESTION: What's the significance of releasing your book on Valentine's Day?**

**ANSWER:** Even though we're talking about divorce, the book really is about love — primarily love for your kids. Co-parenting pleasantly and politely, that can be really tough to do depending on circumstances of your divorce. It is about love for yourself, being able to let go, being able to move on to the next chapter in your life.



**Book launch party**

A launch party for Karen Buscemi's new book, "I Do, Part 2: How to Survive Divorce, Co-Parent Your Kids and Blend Your Families Without Losing Your Mind," will be 5-7 p.m. Wednesday at Birmingham's South Bar, 210 S. Old Woodward. The free event, which is open to the public, will include a panel of relationship experts, complimentary hors d'oeuvres and happy hour drink specials. Attendees will be able to purchase an advance copy of the book for \$15. For information, call 248-788-1744.

to that point where you really know this is someone you're going to be spending a lot of time with, it's best to keep that person, in your kid's eyes, just on a friend level.

**Q: What are your best tips for creating a big, happy family?**

**A:** It doesn't have to be difficult, but it might take some time. It might mean that all you're seeing are very small changes over the period of a year or two. It took my ex and I a good three years to

get to the point where we really started to feel comfortable around each other, and we could kind of joke with each other.

**Q: What's your best advice for someone trying to improve the relationship with an ex-spouse?**

**A:** The thing that I think people can do is to find your normal voice and use it. When you talk to your ex, talk in a nice normal voice that you would do with anyone else. If you can help your ex out by making a schedule change, do it. If you're flexible, your ex is going to get on board that flexibility train, too. You can't say "Oh, you're going out to dinner with some woman? I'm not going to baby-sit." And finally, keep your ex in the loop about anything concerning your kid, whether it's a bad grade or a tumble in the driveway on the skateboard.

**Q: Chapter 15 talks about ex-spouses being in the same room with no bloodshed. What do couples need to keep in mind to accomplish that?**

**A:** If your ex is remarried, you have to be friendly with the new spouse. I mean, you shouldn't be best buddies, but you should be able to have nice chitchat that you might do with the cashier at the grocery store. You're not too involved in each other's lives but you feel like if you see each other, it's not something you've got to hide from.

**Q: What do you say to couples who think blending their families just won't work?**

**A:** I don't think that everybody can do it. Somebody can just be a very jealous person by nature. It's just too hard for them to be around an ex with a new love, or it could be just matters of really bad feelings that somebody has just not been able to let go of. You can have your own version of one big happy family. It's whatever works best for all of you.

■ TO ORDER A COPY OF THE BOOK, GO TO WWW.NORLIGHTSPRESS.COM.

■ CONTACT ERIN HILL PERRY AT 313-222-6428 OR ELHILL@FREEPRESS.COM.



Karen Buscemi

Karen Buscemi wrote "I Do, Part 2" after successfully navigating divorce and remarriage.

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**me**

**TODAY'S TOPIC**  
**Mom gamers: Do you play video games with your daughters? Sons? Here's what local moms had to say:**

**On Detroit.MomsLikeMe.com**

"Yes, I occasionally play video games with my daughter, but we're playing cutesie, child type games (no battling, violence)."  
— last2know

"I never play video games with either of my kids. I don't seem to be coordinated enough to get the little people (or cars or whatever) to do what I want them to do."  
— BridgetTheBoss

"We are a gamer family so all the kids like games and we all play some kind. (I like the word games or hidden object games online) and I can see where it helps with hand eye coordination and with my hubby's aggression (he plays first person shooter games) but my kids aren't really all that aggressive so I haven't seen any thing to that effect yet."  
— themirolands

"DD and I play Wii games together, Mario, Sonic, and of course the Dance ones. We have a great time together, lots of laughter and a small bit of competition, but it's all good."  
— Lori33

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