

Introduction to *Love Actually for Single Parents* [& Those Dating Them]

Nearly 15 years ago, on a plane bound for San Antonio with my toddler, I met a very kind man who told me that everything would be okay.

I needed to borrow his faith. I had run away from my home in California, where my then-husband was a danger to himself, to me, and to our two-year-old, who had recently been diagnosed with a chronic condition. I pretended to be leaving for a long family visit, and we never went back.

I ran to my family in Texas--leaving behind a research and academic career, pets, community, friends, colleagues, students, and the first house I'd ever bought. A suitcase and a case of pneumonia went with me.

It was the lowest point of my life, admitting defeat and leaving so much I loved, including the father of my child, a good man with a bad problem. I was unemployed for over a year, and wondered who I was. After all, my life from age 17 onward was dedicated to developing a career I now couldn't hope to replicate. It felt like I would never feel cheer or humor or love again. I went to therapy and was on antidepressants...for years.

Many people helped us. A few were: my mom and stepdad, who opened their house to us for eight months and gave my child a solid family where he was continually safe, cherished, and cared for; women in the community, who actively included us in their lives and who showed compassion without judgment; doctors who assured me I was doing fine keeping my child safe, and who treated me as a peer as I sought help for my own depression; the priest-turned-lawyer who made sure I got unemployment benefits even though I'd left my job voluntarily, "because you did the only thing a good parent had a choice to do;" the small-business owner who made me president of her company, and who remains a close friend; and that very kind man on the plane, who knew nothing of my situation but could see that I was suffering and assured me there were brighter days ahead.

Ultimately, and most vitally, there was Vic Hariton, who saw everything we could be, and what I could do, and who became my husband and the hero of my story. We met four years into my single-parent journey. Over a decade after our vows, we've created lives, shared and separate, that are filled with meaning and joy and that we wouldn't have dreamed of without the support of the other.

Dating: Before Children Vs. After Children

In this book, I delve into real people's challenges and explore my personal trials, too. It's imperative that if I'm going to write about your struggles, I should come clean about my own. I'm not preaching at you from the Mt. Olympus of perfection. I've been tried, found

wanting, and recovered from a badly broken heart, not just metaphorically but literally: I required open-heart surgery a few years after leaving my ex. I know the emotional, financial, and physical toll and unique challenges that rebuilding your life while single-parenting can bring.

One of those unique challenges is dating. Because if you've dated *Before Children and After Children*, you know it's not the same! The book you're now reading is a whole new take for single parents who are committed to getting love right this time around, with information on challenges that specifically deal with your needs.

As a single mom in her 30s wrote to me, "I've really had to reevaluate the people I choose to date and spend time with. Now it's not just my life and time I'm wasting, but potentially my child's (even though so far nobody has made it far enough to be introduced)."

She's right, of course. Think back to your BC dating. Remember the freedom to schedule time together when you wanted, regardless of your mother's babysitting availability? To spend an evening together that neither of you planned? To go where you wanted, and stay out as late as you liked—or even have a spontaneous weekend away? To have someone overnight without wondering how to hide their presence from/explain their presence to your kids? To have sex in the living room, without wondering who might pop in? To Netflix and chill with someone you've just met, without worrying whether it was too soon for them to meet your child?

More seriously, remember what it was like to date without having a difficult ex? To not wonder how much the kids would leak to their other parent, or how much your ex might try to pry out of them? To meet new partners without needing to forgive your ex, or yourself? To consider only yourself and your desires, without fearing what your choices might mean for the lives you've already created? To meld your life with someone else's, without also trying to convince the kids that this is a good idea? To have months or even years as just-you-two? To live together and not consider the impact of the move on your kids' ties to their other parent, grandparents, step-sibs, etc.?

When a marriage comes with an ex and kids, a whole village can be involved in your love life. Bringing two people together isn't nearly as tough as bringing all these people together. Geez. No wonder so many custodial single parents decide to remain single! The complexity, and the struggle, are real.

Challenges This Book Addresses

Like many of you, I struggled in my post-separation life. There were many hard times and a lot of work before and after Vic and I met. Luck played its role, but chance favors the prepared—and with a child to consider and a broken heart to fix, this time I made sure I was ready for success. After all, my mistakes would now cost not only me, but my child.

I was determined not to remain alone.

I was equally determined to get it right this time.

The secret of my success was relationship science. Although my Ph.D., laboratory, and professorship at Cal State Fullerton had been devoted to studying successful memory and aging, my new passion was for sciences I could apply to my mate search, from psychology to anthropology, sociology, and biology. Where my professional objective had been to create publishable research, my new research goal was purely personal. The results are my marriage to Vic, my international client practice, the LoveScience blog read in more than 30 nations, and ultimately, the *Love Factually* books.

This is the first book that relies on science rather than opinion, to help single parents find the right partner not only for themselves but also for their children. It's the book I needed, wanted, and ultimately never found, and you've been on my mind as I've written it. If you're a single parent, you may have seen that most dating books sound as if the world is child-free, and as though opinion is all that's available. Yet why would we trust our lives and our children's to opinion by itself, when there's science to guide us?

Take meeting someone, for instance. One way to maximize your exposure and quickly find out whether that person fits your must-haves is to date online—an increasingly common way to get happily hitched¹. But did you know there are dating sites and apps where up to a third of the guys are already married²? They're not all created with equal clientele. Knowing who's likely to be where is a key to saving your limited time and emotional bandwidth.

Another example is arguing. All couples disagree at times, and fighting about child discipline can get even more complex when the kids in question aren't yours³. But science tells us that some forms of arguing are toxic, while other forms are healing. Across decades, studies have found that happy couples complain even *more* than unhappy couples do--and that there's a formula for complaining that gets the best results in the moment, as well as over the long haul⁴.

Science even tells us at which ages in your children's lives you are likely to more easily and successfully repartner, and how the children's gender affects those efforts⁵.

This information has been put to work for me and my clients. Now, it can work for you.

Using research, I found answers for my most pressing questions—and yours. Before writing this book, I wanted to double-check whether the struggles I faced as a dating single parent were the same as those that other men and women—single parents, those dating them, and those raised by them-- were confronting. So I prepared a questionnaire asking those folks to share their challenges, and they responded generously.

As their answers make clear, most of us, regardless of gender, are dealing with many of the same issues. Some that are explored in this book include:

- *How do I deal with, get over, and (maybe) forgive my ex?
- *How do I keep my kids out of the middle?
- *How can I face my fears, improve my self-esteem, and take care of myself while dating?
- *What are the best ways to meet people when my schedule is tight?
- *How can I find people who are willing and able to meet my needs, and maybe some of my children's needs?
- *How can I quickly tell whether someone is safe for me/my kids?
- *(How) can I remember to flirt?!
- *How much has dating changed? I feel rusty.
- *When's the right time for an adult sleepover?
- *When's the right time for my kids to meet someone new?
- *Should we live together before/instead of making more of a commitment?
- *What's the best way to blend families? (And what if my kids hate my partner?)
- *How do I set boundaries on how much parenting my partner does?
- *How can I tell whether my new relationship is workable?
- *How can I grow my relationships with my partner and my kids, even when we disagree?
- *If I have to break up with a new partner, how do I cushion the blow for my children?
- *How do we move forward together when we're both sure: Yes! This is it!?

For readers of my first book, you'll find much new information here. *Love Factually for Single Parents [& Those Dating Them]* specifically deals with issues relevant to your situation. Because love can be more complicated the next time around, this new *Love Factually* contains many more Exercises and examples than my first book did. If you haven't yet read the original *Love Factually*, it's the first book to use relationship science to give step-by-step dating guidance so you find the love of your life, whether or not you're a parent. This new book likewise relies on science rather than opinion, but it covers new and different ground—supplementing the first, without replacing it. I recommend reading both, but you can benefit from each book without referring to the other.

Who This Book Is For

When I was dating the first time around, I yearned for one solid, lifelong relationship--not a string of them. And that certainly does happen; the current divorce rate for first marriages is around 30%, nowhere near the 50% statistic often cited⁶.

Yet ending a mateship is common around the world. From hunter-gatherer tribal cultures to the most developed nations, all have their ways of putting asunder what culture, law, and love had joined together⁷. This means that globally, relationships and families are diverse. Today, about half of American children live in some arrangement other than the iconic nuclear family⁸.

The upshot? In many Westernized nations today, stepfamilies are almost as common as intact unions.

What's not the norm is losing your need for sexual union and emotional companionship after a relationship ends. People need people all the way through life, and most of us need one primary adult partnership to thrive at our highest levels emotionally, sexually, and in terms of health, longevity, and wealth⁹. Some longitudinal research even concludes that the most effective way to get over a lost love is to find a new one¹⁰.

So the question isn't whether most single parents can or will love again. Love is likely! Most of you, like me, aren't going to throw in the towel. But success is harder. Largely due to the pressures listed above, After Children unions are significantly likelier to end in divorce than BC marriages are—with up to 75% of couples divorcing if both have children when they repartner¹¹. *Let's use science to increase those odds to be more in your favor.*

This book is for you, single parents: people who have had children and then either divorced or, if never married, separated from their partner. If this is you, you may feel a need to find not only the right partner for yourself, but for your children, and maybe even for your grandchildren. You may be distrustful of yourself and your judgments, and consequently, have trust issues about others, and deeper ambivalence about whether getting into another relationship is worth the risk. Maybe you find yourself taking the very long view of all your relationships: marriage sometimes does end, but parenthood is forever, and you want to consider all of this as you make wise and happy decisions. This book will help you sort all these issues out.

This book is also for single parents who never had a mate to begin with, or whose partner has died. In either of these situations, you're likely well-versed in the fears of involving new people in your kids' lives, and the dilemmas of finding someone worthy and good for all of you when your time and energy are at a premium. Relationship science will help you resolve those fears and dilemmas.

This book is for single parents regardless of age or gender or sexual orientation. Although there's a lot more relationship science on cisgender, heterosexual people, I'll incorporate diverse perspectives whenever possible, and suggest how heteronormative science may apply when that's all we've got.

What if you're not a single parent yourself, but you're dating someone who is? This book will help you understand your prospective partner's experiences, and it will show you how to make a happy life with them and their entourage. I also present examples of the non-parent's perspective, so your new partner-with-kids can appreciate your experience, too.

Finally, I hope that friends, parents-of-single-parents, employers, therapists, and others who care about single parents find this an invaluable reference.

If you're a parent who is already in a marriage or committed partnership and want to know whether to stay or go, you can write to me at Duana@LoveScienceMedia.com and I will point you towards helpful resources to make that weighty decision. And if you're looking for an open relationship, polyamory, or a noncommitted relationship, I am fully in favor of your finding that—but this book won't satisfy you.

I can't candy-coat it: dating After Children is tough. All the challenges you faced BC are likely to be magnified, and new ones pop up with daunting regularity. And yet, because of science, there's every reason to be hopeful that you, yes you, can find love for yourself and your family—and have your happily-ever-after, after all. As one of my clients put it, “In our conversations, one of the most affecting and touching things you communicated to me was that I deserve a healing love; a love that restores me and makes me feel safe and at home. I strongly believe that this is absolutely what any single parent needs to hear, believe, and have wished for them. They already know what's hard.”

You certainly do. So although you already may have been through the pain of single parents who've loved and lost, hang in there. Keep reading. Let science help you, as it has so many. And don't give up. Yes, love can hurt. But it heals us, too. Let's find it for you now.

Duana C. Welch, Ph.D.

This has been an excerpt from *Love Factually for Single Parents [& Those Dating Them]* (2019; copyright Duana C. Welch, all rights reserved). To order the full first edition in e-book, audiobook, or paperback, on and after January 9, 2019 please click the appropriate link (links available at that time).

Please note that the book will be up for pre-order in October of 2018 and can be purchased as of January 7, 2019. If you are reading this prior to the pre-order date, and you are signed up for my emails, you'll receive notification as soon as the book is available!

Advance Praise, *Love Factually for Single Parents [& Those Dating Them]*

“Terrific, scientifically sound advice; every reader will finish wiser.”
~David Buss, Ph.D., author of *The Evolution of Desire: Strategies of Human Mating*

"The must-read for single parents in the dating arena. Brilliant."
~eHarmony

“A wise, hopeful, and yes, factual guide for everyone who has loved and lost. This book will heal your heart and help you love again—this time, for life.”
~Susan Page, author of *If I'm So Wonderful, Why Am I Still Single?*

“AT LAST--a superb research-based, reader-friendly guide to dating and mating after a significant romantic relationship has ended.”

~Everett L. Worthington, Jr., Ph.D.

Author of *Couple Therapy: A New Hope-Focused Approach*

“Don’t sit back and hope love happens. Instead, get the facts for you and your children. You will love reading this book!”

~Dr. Terri Orbuch (PhD), author of "*5 Simple Steps to Take Your Marriage From Good to Great*" and "*Finding Love Again: 6 Simple Steps to a New and Happy Relationship*"

“We don’t get this mating training at home growing up....Add children to the equation and people definitely need this wonderfully specialized book.”

~Joan Norton, attorney-mediator, family law

“A must read....provides all the knowledge, skills, and tools single parents need to succeed at the complicated task of creating lasting love.”

~Tim Cole, PhD., author of *Broken Trust: Overcoming an Intimate Betrayal*

“Find laughter, healing, balance, and a partner to fearlessly love. As a counselor and a single parent, I highly recommend this book!”

~Carrie Lynne Pietig, licensed professional counselor

Advance Praise, *Love Factually: 10 Proven Steps from I Wish to I Do*

“Finally we have a research-based guide for how to sensibly select a partner. A must read for all those of us seeking a lasting love.”

~Dr. John Gottman, author of *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*

“If you are going to read any book about love – make it *Love Factually*.”

~eHarmony

"*Love Factually* is a great book. It's anchored in solid science. It brings key principles to life with gripping real-life mating stories. And importantly, it brims with practical advice in the form of concrete actions everyone can take to improve their love lives. If you plan to read one book to improve your mating life, this is the one to read."

~David M. Buss, Ph.D., author of *The Evolution of Desire: Strategies of Human Mating*

“*Love Factually* is a real treat: a smart, funny page-turner, full of heart and based on the best science. If you're at any stage of the dating process, you'll get the clear, doable steps you've needed all along to find and keep the right life partner. And if you're already

happily wed, you'll be entertained by all the sage advice you can pass on to others. I was hooked from the first chapter, and I'm married and know the research inside out!"

~Dr. Linda J. Waite, professor of sociology at the University of Chicago, and author of *The Case For Marriage*

"This book is a ray of hope in a world of cynicism. Even better, it's hope founded on fact. *Love Factually* is a helping, healing journey."

~Susan Page, author, *If I'm So Wonderful, Why am I Still Single?*

"If you want to transform your dating life into an *effective* search that significantly increases your odds of meeting the right person, *Love Factually* is a must read. Dr. Duana Welch is like having a kind, gentle, funny, and firm love guide/guru beside you as you traverse the rocky trail of being able to fully embrace a healthy, deeply fulfilling, satisfying and enriching relationship. I recommend this book to my clients, and to men and women who are serious about investing in themselves in order to become, and attract, the person they want and deserve."

~Carrie Lynne Pietig, LPC-S, using Gottman Method Couples Therapy in private practice

"*Love Factually* is like having Malcolm Gladwell and Brené Brown gene-splice with Dear Abby and The Rules. The Steps here are fantastic, and it's a great, fun read we highly recommend!"

~Ellen Fein & Sherrie Schneider, authors of *The Rules*, *All the Rules*, and *Not Your Mother's Rules*