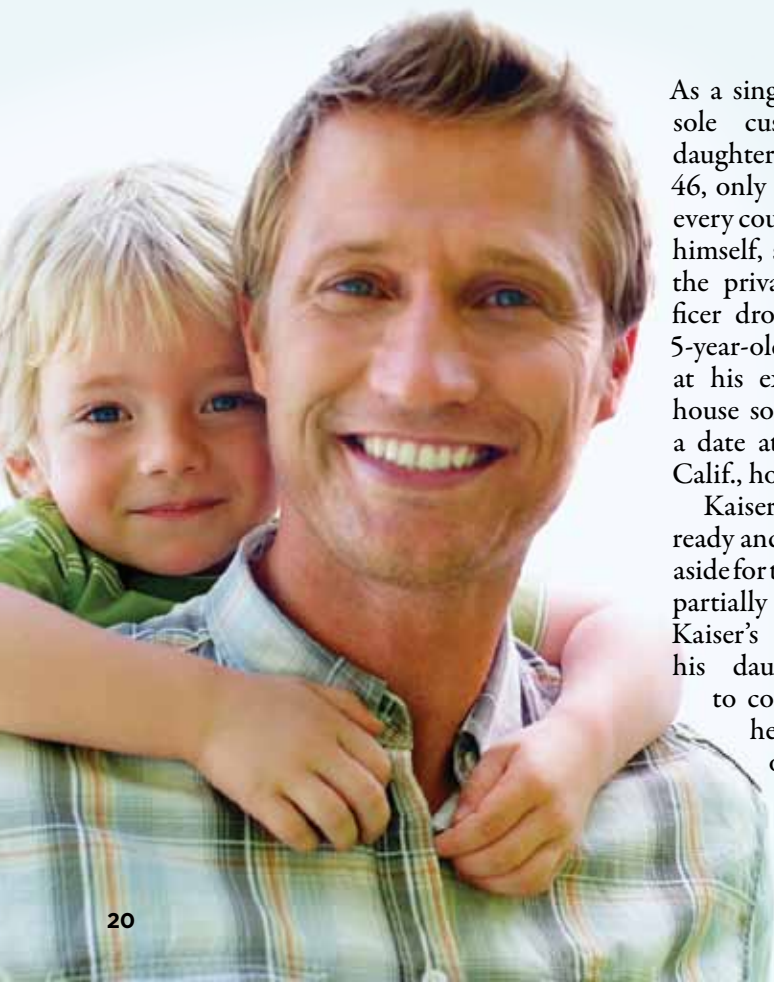


# 4 tips

for dating a  
Catholic single parent

BY JESSICA  
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As a single parent with sole custody of his daughter, Doug Kaiser, 46, only has two nights every couple of weeks to himself, so one evening the private security officer dropped his then 5-year-old daughter off at his ex-wife's nearby house so he could host a date at his El Cajon, Calif., home.

Kaiser had dinner ready and a movie set aside for the evening, but partially into the date, Kaiser's phone rang — his daughter wanted to come home, and he reluctantly obliged, much to the date's frustration.

"We didn't

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see each other again after that,” he said.

The kids always come first, Kaiser said, which is one of the many unique challenges single parents face when navigating the dating scene. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are some 13.7 million single parents responsible for raising 21.8 million children, which makes it likely you will encounter a single parent in your dating pursuits – if you haven’t already.

Parenthood changes the dating game, so here’s what you need to know and understand about dating a single Catholic parent:

## **1 The kids always come first**

For single father Michael James, 45, a program manager in the defense industry from San Diego, Calif., the biggest mistake someone can make when dating a single parent is to not understand the level of commitment a parent has for a child.

“My focus has remained on what is best for my children first, and I have to put my desires and needs on the back burner,” he said. James prefers to date single parents who comprehend his unique situation.

“The relationships I have with other single parents are much better,” he said. “They understand the requirements and have similar experiences to draw from.”

Allen Venezio, 37, a music teacher from Minneola, Fla., does not solely date other single parents, but he often feels a deeper connection to

“The key is not to date anyone who you don’t feel would be a good match for your child,” he said. “Your child must always come first.”

parents who appreciate his role as a father to his 4-year-old son.

“The commonalities you share with regards to parenting, custody issues and former significant others makes it easy to relate to each other and allows you to connect in a way you cannot with someone who does not have children,” he said.

Most women Venezio has dated have been respectful of his priorities.

“The key is not to date anyone who you don’t feel would be a good match for your child,” he said. “Your child must always come first.”

## **2 There’s more than one schedule to coordinate**

Logistically, dating a single parent is challenging. Depending on the

child's age, dates may need to be scheduled around soccer practice, day care or school functions.

"You don't have to just manage your schedule but juggle your child's schedule as well," said Strandrea Williams, 34, a quality assurance specialist from Atlanta.

James agrees that scheduling can be an obstacle when maintaining a relationship.

"It's a very delicate balance between finding and having time to date and making sure your parental duties stay as the main priority in your life," he said.

For Kellee Michelle Bartha, a 39-

always have to consider whether I should find a sitter or see if the guy would be opposed to my 2-year-old joining us," she said.



## Your role is unique

Knowing when or if to involve children in the dating process can be stressful for single parents. When Bartha was in a relationship, her son quickly bonded with her boyfriend. He often went on dates with the couple and neither Bartha nor her boyfriend took issue with that.

"Every situation is different, and it depends if you see a potential future," she said. "Be careful with public displays of affection, as my son suddenly became very possessive of me."

Kaiser said some women he dates compete with his children for attention or love, which can ruin the relationship. "I will call my daughter to say good night whenever she's with her mother," he said, "and when I say 'I love you' to my daughter, I have had my date say, 'Don't you love me?'"

A woman dating a single father must have an intuitive grasp of

year-old engineer from San Diego, it's difficult to find a place for her adopted son to go during a date. "I

how she fits into the picture, Kaiser emphasized – and not try to force her unique role into something it isn't.

## BEYOND THE LABEL 'SINGLE PARENT'

The term "single parent" may be broader than you think. The age and living situation of the children can vary greatly and affect the parent's dating life in different ways.

"I am a 45-year-old male that raised a now 20-year-old son and continues to raise a 16-year-old daughter. [It would be] significantly different if my daughter was 4-years-old and my son was still at home," James said.

Bartha, who adopted her nephew, cautions daters to not stereotype single parents, as everyone's situation is unique and deeply personal.

"Due to my current, very unusual situation I am in," Bartha said, "it has allowed me to open my eyes."

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Only two women have ever met Kaiser's children. "I am very protective with my girls, and it takes a lot before I will bring anyone into their lives," he said.

James believes that it would be too confusing to bring someone new into his home. "A better avenue may be to expose them to a potential future mate in an environment where there are other familiar people," he suggested.

## **4** Faith comes first

For Catholics, dating can be especially complex, as the search criteria likely include someone who can serve as a faith figure in a child's life.

"The new person has to uplift your faith and your parenting," Williams said. "We want the same things as any single parent wants...the only difference is that we want our future spouse to share in the rich heritage that is our Catholic faith and share

it with our future children."

Bartha's greatest hope for her future spouse is that he would be a good, Catholic man who would be willing to help her and her son grow in their faith.

"There are many things to consider, but I am open to taking the op-

portunity with someone who seems like they could be the right person, the one God has planned for me, in order to see first-hand whether they can fill the role of a good Christian man and father," she said.

Take the advice from these single Catholic parents — they may be parents, but they are still singles who long for a supportive, loving spouse. Your life plan may not have included a spouse with a child, but their life plan may not have included raising a child alone. Through unconditional love and Christ-like acceptance, you may find your place in a family who yearned for you all along. ■

**13.7**  
**MILLION**

■ NUMBER OF SINGLE  
PARENTS IN THE U.S.