

PARENTHING WEEKLY

# The soft landing

When a new partner arrives, the only footing that really shifts is the child's.

**31 August to 4 September 2026 | [parenthing.ie](https://parenthing.ie)**

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# The heads-up isn't for your ex

When a separated parent starts seeing someone new, the whole thing turns into an adults' question. Do I owe the other parent a heads-up, do they owe me one, whose business is it anyway. It gets fought as etiquette and fairness between two people who often aren't speaking.

Two things are true at once. A parent has every right to a private life and a new relationship. And a child who meets a new adult with no warning feels a small floor shift under them. The argument is loud about the wrong person. The only footing that really moves is the child's.

# 8.8%

of children already live in a step-family. A parent's new partner is an ordinary chapter, not an edge case.

ONS, England and Wales, Census 2021. Ireland does not collect the figure the same way.

## THIS WEEK'S TIP

# Give the change a runway

A soft landing is mostly about lowering two things a child feels: surprise, and tension. A quiet, unshowy heads-up between two homes takes care of the first. Keeping the introduction low-key, short and somewhere neutral takes care of a lot of the second.

No big announcement, no test of loyalty, no performance for anyone. Just enough notice that a new face on Saturday isn't something your child has to work out alone.



## **A heads-up between two homes isn't a courtesy you hand your ex. It's stability you hand your child.**

The research is steady on this: it's rarely the new partner or the second home that unsettles a child, it's the conflict and the surprise around the change.

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# The useful question is a quieter one

It's tempting to keep score on who told whom, and when. It changes nothing for the child. So swap the question. Not what do I owe the other parent, but how does my child get a soft landing.

That reframe costs nothing and asks for no goodwill you don't already have. It just needs one plain, dated note passing between two homes, in whatever form works for you.

**Start free at [parenting.ie](https://parenting.ie)**

## SOURCES

Foundations (formerly the Early Intervention Foundation), evidence on inter-parental conflict and child outcomes.

[foundations.org.uk](https://foundations.org.uk)

ONS, Step-families and dependent children, Census 2021 (England and Wales). [ons.gov.uk](https://ons.gov.uk)

Psychology Today, how and when to introduce a new partner to your children. [psychologytoday.com](https://psychologytoday.com)

