

## LL35-When Kids or Pets are in the way

I'm Alvean Lyons, and I'm Doug Weiss and welcome to Love Life.

OK Douglas it's that question that comes up when you are either a pet parent or a people parent. How do you find balance in your relationship when you have these little ones that sometimes get in the way? Is there a way to be able to get it back to the way that you want it to be or the way that it used to be? How do you find that balance again ... what do you say because you are a pet parent right now too, so how do you guys manage that?

Let me say this is a thorny subject and one that can often be emotionally charged because we love our children and we love our pets and often we treat our pets like they are our children.... and for some people they absolutely are. So really what we're talking about here is the possibility for unhealthy competition in affection and it doesn't matter whether this is children or pets, it's anything that creates an unhealthy imbalance or a competition for love or approbation, for affection in a relationship. When you're dividing your attention it's hard at times to ensure that you are paying attention to all of those in your life that you love. In Life, Love and Internet Dating I wrote about this at some length, about people who go up on a dating sites, and I have to say Ladies I hope you won't take me too much to task for this, but often at least in my experience.....

Proceed with caution.

I will see profiles and women will talk about their past relationships but all the pictures are with their pet.

Now I think it's appropriate to say I have a pet and that pet is important to me.

In fact I saw a great many more women who featured their pet and talked about their pet then I saw women featuring talk about their children. The signal you're sending has two dimensions to it. One can be Love me love my pet, and within reason I get that it's putting me on notice. If you don't like animals, if you don't care about them I'm probably not the person for you. But it can also be seen as a gigantic 'stay away, don't come any closer sign, because my pet comes first. And that's often the message. This is the gate keeper around my affections, my pet. I can tell you this ladies from a male perspective. We don't want to compete. We'd rather not go there in the first place. That doesn't mean we don't care, we do, very much, but we want balance and we want your attention too just as you want our attention. The thing about animals is that they're largely undemanding. I think it's a whole lot easier to love an animal than it is to love a person. People are messy and people don't always live up to our expectations. People have their own wills and their own needs and desires and warts and flaws and they don't forget. With animals it's like it didn't happen and you know they're always ready to love you and see you. So it's very easy to get a kind of unconditional love from an animal, and I'm not going to tell you that it's meaningless. It's very meaningful, We were talking in an episode not long ago about love and relationships and their effect on health and there is a lot of evidence that people with pets live longer. So, I'm not going to be the naysayer here, but I'm going to say if you desire a relationship with another human being, then you'd better figure out how to have that relationship on its terms and not put the two into contention with one another.

I have to say that everything that you said certainly could be applied to children because it's the same issue I hear men say all the time that they almost wish.... and they hate to admit it.... but they almost wish that their significant others, their partners, their spouses loved them the way they loved their children There's such an unconditional love that seems to exist for our children.... and they get into all kinds of stuff. They get in Trouble, they make mistakes, but somehow they always seem to find their way back to this affirmative love that doesn't seem to have that same level of elasticity when it comes to you and me as adult people who care and love for each other. So it's really interesting to listen to men convey that particular message. I almost never hear it with women, and women rarely will say that they believe that their daughters or their sons come before them inside of a marriage. I won't say never, but I rarely hear that come up. But I frequently hear men say that at various points inside of their relationships their children unequivocally came before them

and what's interesting is that none of these men are saying I don't want you to love the kids, and none of them are even saying I want you to love me more than the kids. I hear them say I wish she loved me like she loved the kids. As mommies we almost can't control it. We have to work very hard especially when it comes to our kids because in our world we're one hundred percent responsible for how they turn out, but you whom I married, somebody else made you. So all those things that irritate me about you someone else was responsible for and I can't completely unraise you and reraise you, but this little one over here I could craft exactly the way that I want. Often our energies go in that direction for that reason. And the kids, assuming you have good kids, and most of us do, they love you in a way that just makes you feel like what you are pouring out is coming back the way that you wanted. So we don't have to be careful about that particularly as women to not let that take the lead entirely inside of the relationship. I've seen a few relationships where both with respect to pets and with respect to children the couple are both great at their relationships with their pets and both great in their relationships the children but just terrible with each other.

I've seen it too and when you are around that for a while you begin to scratch your head and wonder how is this possible? How could these people be so fantastic as parents, so fantastic as pet parents and so loving, affectionate, willing to look the other way at everything and indulgent--not over indulgent--but intelligent about the frailties and challenges that accompany that proposition and yet so unwilling to cut each other slack. It is almost to the point of if there's ever a divorce the fight is going to be about it's not going to be about us it's going to be about who gets who gets the dog and the child. And you wonder what the conditions were that brought those people together in the first place. That's part of the question, how the feelings they may have had for one another got diverted out of their frustration with each other. When people use their children or their pets as a way to distract themselves from achieving rapprochement with each other that's the beginning of the end of that relationship. And people do this unfortunately. All too frequently and they use other things, other relationships as a way to avoid the challenges that they're having with their primary relationship. They create a distraction for themselves and then they invest themselves almost exclusively in this other relationship to the exclusion of the primary relationship and it becomes fallow. And all manner of mischief accrues from there, whether it's just quarreling, fighting and acrimony or one or both seeking in other relationships or with a new relationship the missing ingredients. I say this to recently divorced people, men and women because this works both ways, who often will go out and get a pet because they're missing the company of someone and this is a way to fill some part of their lives, be careful that you're not just substituting. Yes pets are uncomplicated, I grant you, but it's also not the same degree of richness. In a divorce, the key thing to be mature enough to understand that the most important part of this are your children.

To your point in terms of substitutions, what I tend to see inside of relationship in my counselling sometimes and consulting with women who have sons is the tendency to make their sons their spouses. Especially as their sons approach adulthood the bond that they create with their sons needs to be appropriate. By placing a level of responsibility on your son to give you the loyalty, the affection, the support, the consistency that I don't believe my spouse is ever going to give me or is not giving me puts pressure on that son to be something that he was never created to be. And when he gets into his own relationship the tension that is created and that tug of war between the mother and the wife or the significant other can be a nasty thing to have to navigate. It's all because there were unhealthy bonds and connections that were created because the child became the distraction from the marriage and then the parent became dependent on that child in a way that that should not have happened. So it's important that we are mindful that balance is essential to health and when we take things out of balance too much or too little we always leave a place of homeostatis. We need to be thoughtful about the ways in which we are investing our emotional love, our attentions and our affections such that there is healthy reciprocity and the wrong things are not getting too much emphasis.

To end this on a positive note I think that when couples mutually invest in their pets or children there is a positive synergy that that's a healthy robust situation. What you're going to see there, almost invariably, are people who really are loving towards each other and have a strong and abiding relationship.

Well that's our our episode for this week. Once again have had some interesting and hopefully

provocative give and take for our audience and we hope we're going to hear from you. You can do that by writing to us at [doug@lovelife.digital](mailto:doug@lovelife.digital) or [alvean@lovelife.digital](mailto:alvean@lovelife.digital)

We want to thank Chelsea Washington, our producer, Todd Washburn, our Recording Engineer and the entire Love Life family, including you, our listeners. We'll be back next week with another episode. Until then, have a wonderful week. Bye folks.