

HOW TO DEAL WITH PARENTS REMARRYING

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Growing up in Bangladesh involves navigating through various taboos. There are things that people are not willing to talk about as you are growing up, depending on how liberal or conservative a family may be. Though single parents are more prevalent now in urban Bangladesh than ever documented before, one's parents remarrying still doesn't seem to be something that is discussed openly. Having a single parent raising you is a different experience in

hope is lost. Here's a little breakdown of what we learnt.

Tani Ahmed* has been living with her mother and sister since her parents divorced. Between parental visits and growing up with her extended family telling her to get her parents back together, one day her mother announced that she would be remarrying.

"My mother and father divorced when I was really young, so I never struggled with it as much as my sister did. When my mother said that she was

thought I would be more devastated by the divorce. Everyone expected my parents to remain together for my sake but I think something like that would've just made me feel guilty. Both my parents are happier this way, so why wouldn't I be happy for them?" – Tani said.

Ahsan Alvee* saw his parents undergo a tumultuous divorce after 20 years together. With fuel being added to the fire by his extended family, the process of his parents' separation was made more challenging than it already was with the question of custody of him and his elder sibling looming over the horizon. Being against the divorce itself and being at the centre of the drama that was hardly over, Ahsan was quite unhappy when his father announced he would be remarrying.

Ahsan was barely recovering from the process of having to go between two homes and needing permission to see one of his parents. The remarriage was the last thing he wanted. With relatives pushing the idea that he would be getting a new "mother" and causing a fuss over the upcoming wedding, he found himself getting deeper into depression. In a desperate bid for attention, he started doing things he knew would get his parents concerned.

"My friends were cool with it but some of their parents accused me of being 'spoilt' because they didn't understand my way of trying to cope with it. Some of my teachers would also pity me if I came unprepared for a test, which was actually pretty damaging," said Ahsan, 18, reflecting on how society often treats those whose parents remarry.

For Tani, family played a big role in making the situation more difficult.

"I had a more difficult time coping with how my mother's family reacted to this than the remarriage itself. They were initially unhappy with the marriage, and expected my sister and me to break up the marriage. It's as ridiculous as it sounds. I want my mother to be happy," Tani went on to say.

"I didn't really have many issues with coping. I

like the person my mother married. They don't ask me to call him 'father'. I can imagine being forced to call someone else 'dad' might be really discomfoting for people. So I think that's an important thing parents should remember when they remarry," said Tani about her coping mechanisms. She also added that communication is really important, otherwise the kids could easily rebel.

Speaking on a similar note, Ahsan added, "I think the biggest fear that is invoked is that your other parent is being replaced. This is the case even if you don't live with that parent and it is something people around you will probably bring up repeatedly. The key to fixing that is to spend time with the kids so that they never feel like they are alone or that they're losing their parents."

Whether it's a broken home or the loss of a parent, both heavily influence the children. It's easy to fall into destructive behavioural patterns to make sense of the situation. On top of that, having the remaining parent remarry might lead to further identity issues, especially in a society that has made it a taboo to talk about these circumstances.

Ahsan advises that the best way to cope is to take it one day at a time. He suggests steering clear of damaging behaviour such as bottling up emotions by opening up to someone trustworthy and understanding, whoever that may be. He also suggests investing in a hobby and being productive. Lastly, he suggests creating personal boundaries, which are to be communicated to those around you. This, he says, will help everyone understand your needs better and it will also prevent you from spiralling out.

Lastly, it's important to remember that the remarriage is also a new experience for the parent(s). They are facing transformations and they have their own lives too. As Ahsan said, "Be kind to your parents, because it's harder for them than you can imagine."

**Names have been changed to protect the identities of the interviewees.*

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It worked out for Drake and Josh

its own right, and having that parent remarrying leads to many new experiences – good and bad.

The fact that single parenthood also varies in nature from case to case also complicates this further. It sets the conditions for the experience in many ways and sometimes indicates the difficulty of the whole process. However, it's usually the issue of parents remarrying being treated as a social taboo that creates the biggest problem.

In order to break the silence, we enlisted the help of those who have gained the experience. There were plenty of predicaments and struggles, but not all

finally remarrying, I was really happy for her. For the most part, I wasn't bothered by my parents living apart; as far as I remember, their marriage wasn't a happy one. My sister was unhappier with the divorce than I was," explained Tani, 21. She also went on to add that for her it was not her mother and father divorcing that was the problem, but the many members of her extended family nagging her to get them back together.

"I've seen my sister making attempts to get my parents back together, but I honestly felt it was pointless. I think as the younger sister, everyone

