

Continued from page 18 about her hanging out someplace where her friends are going to be looking for somebody and so that creates a problem.

"I think that married people should stay with married people and single people should stay with single people. I'm not saying you can't maintain a friendship and maintain contact, but to do all these things together and go various places together is not healthy," says Dr. Smith.

When divorced couples are battling for custody of friends, Dr. Smith says they should realize they are putting pressure on their friends and because of this, the situation should be talked about in the open; communication is key.

"What happens is single people, once they get divorced, they have to recognize they put undo strain and stress on their married friends because they have to make choices. They like them both, but now whom do I hang with? Do I go out with our female friend or the husband? So we go out and he's with his girlfriend. Does my wife tell her girlfriend that we were out and who he was with? Do I tell my best friend or my good friend that my wife and I went out with his ex-wife and this was the guy and what I thought about him?"



*Dr. George Smith, a Chicago marriage and family counselor, recommends both sides should speak openly to avoid the awkwardness of the new situation.*

"Often the couple that's married won't say anything to that single person because they don't want to risk friendship or don't want to make it appear that they don't care about the issue. I think single people need to ask, 'Are you OK with our relationship? Are you OK with us going out? How do you see our relationship changing now that I'm single?'"

On the flip side of the custody dispute, Dr. Smith says a person should give their newly-divorced friend support and understanding. This will eliminate a lot of the tension and confusion when continuing a friendship. "A lot of times people grieve and rebuild themselves in different ways; sometimes they need to be alone. Sometimes you can ask your friends, 'How can I be of help? What can I do?' Let them know that you're going to be there for them, but don't put pressure on them to go out and do all sorts of activities, because a lot of times when people go through divorce or separation, it's a loss.

"Sometimes people want to grieve in isolation. Sometimes people who grieve want to be around a lot of people. If you're in doubt about how you can be supportive of your friend, the best thing is to ask," Dr. Smith says.