



## **TIPS AND TRICKS FOR PARENTING IN A BLENDED FAMILY**

### **The Adjustment of Children:**

- 10 years and younger tend to have the easiest time accepting and adjusting to a new step-parent within a positive home environment.
- 10-14 years can have the most challenging time given that they are still very dependent on their parents, are increasingly aware of relationships, and may experience most anxiety and anger about the change in their situation.
- 15 years and older tend to be more focused on their lives, seek an increasing amount of independence from parents, and understand more of the complexities of relationships.

### **Common Thoughts of Children to be Aware of with a Remarriage:**

- The child's private fantasy or hope that their parents' may reunite will end. This may cause the child to begin grieving the loss of their family as they knew it once again as they may have done when the divorce/loss of a parent occurred.
- Children are forced to accept that they will have a new family yet they may be uncertain or anxious as to how the new family will work in terms of roles, responsibilities, moving homes, etc.
- Fear that they will lose the parent to the step-parent, and there will no longer be time for them and their parent's relationship.
- Fear that this step-parent could also leave, that this marriage also could end, and therefore they may feel scared to attach too closely with the step-parent.
- Fear that they will have to choose between a parent and step-parent or that their parent's role will be replaced.
- Conflicted with their own emotions of liking their step-parent on one hand but not wanting to like them and accept them on the other hand. As a result, their behaviors may create a push and pull dynamic.
- Questions: "Where does my loyalty need to be?"

### **Important Tips for Parents:**

- Give your child your undivided attention daily where you are not on the phone, computer, or talking with others.
- Demonstrate interest in your child by asking their opinions about household issues, activities, and etcetera. You are still the parent and you can consider their input in your decisions regarding the new household arrangement.
- Maintain consistent contact with the non-custodial parent as it was established before the remarriage.
- Allow the children to talk about their parent and step-parents
- Listen to your child's complaints and let them know you hear them, but do not join in complaining or blaming.

### **Tips for Parents and Step-parents:**

- Define clear roles and responsibilities for parents, step-parents, and children
- Determine what behaviors are unacceptable from the children and determine privately what the consequence will be. However, allow the parent to do the disciplining with the children directly.
- Make decisions based on consistency, what is good for the child, not out of guilt.
- Expect that the blended family will work differently than the previous family dynamic.
- Be aware of tendencies to under-parent your own children while over-parenting your step-children.
- Try to stay engaged when times become difficult and avoid temptation to withdraw or give-up.



- Stay present in the here and now. Consider the challenges as a chapter or phase in the development of the family and try not to catastrophize what will occur years from now.
- Set time to nurture the marriage without the children present.
- Take time in getting to know each child and allow the relationship time to develop
- Allow time and don't rush the process. It can take a good 3-5 years to establish the relationships.
- Part-time step-family relationships will take longer due to less time together on a regular basis.
- Expect ups and downs until a norm for the family can be established.

**Step-Parenting Following the Death of a Parent:**

- These remarriages can be more challenging due to the idealized role of the parent who has died
- Honor the parent who has died, by being open to talking and sharing about their experiences with their parent who has died.
- Reinforce the parent and step-parent are two separate relationships and are not in competition with one another.

**Remember:**

- Recent studies suggest that 80% of children in blended families are healthy and resilient at 5 and 10 years later.
- The first 2 years tend to be the most challenging
- The myth of the "evil step-parent is not the common reality
- Healthy marriages and communication produce healthy kids!

**Resources:**

- [www.stepfamily.org](http://www.stepfamily.org)
- [www.stepfamilies.inf/faq.php](http://www.stepfamilies.inf/faq.php)
- [parenthood.library.wisc.edu/Bliss/Bliss.html](http://parenthood.library.wisc.edu/Bliss/Bliss.html)