

HELP FOR BLENDED FAMILIES

Family life is full of challenges and rewards. Stepfamily life is the same, but it helps to have a map. Whether your remarriage was preceded by death or divorce, these tips from blended family expert Ron Deal will help your family succeed:

1 STEP DOWN your expectations of how quickly your blended family will bond and find harmony. The average stepfamily needs between five to seven years to form a family identity. In movies, love between adults and bonding with children happens quickly; in real life, it happens gradually.

- ◇ Be patient with yourself, your marriage, and the children as family members find their fit. You cook a stepfamily slowly in a Crockpot, not forcibly in a blender!
- ◇ If still dating, slow down on a decision on marriage. Kids need more time than adults to get used to the idea of a wedding.

2 TWO-STEP. The couple's relationship is by far the most important in the step-family home, yet it is often the weakest link. Make sure your marriage doesn't get lost in the blender.

- ◇ Declare your marriage the new foundation for your home and balance it with a strong commitment of time and energy to your children.

- ◇ Become a ghost buster! Identify and deal with any painful ghosts from a previous marriage so that they don't affect trust in this relationship.

3 STEP IN LINE as a parental team. Step-parents must focus on relationship building with stepchildren, and former spouses should learn between home cooperation.

- ◇ Former spouses who communicate well and cooperate on behalf of their children are also making success for the new blended family more likely. Put your differences aside and focus on being good parents for your children.
- ◇ Early on, biological parents should continue to be the primary disciplinarian to their children while stepparents build relationship, trust, and respect with stepchildren.

4 SIDE STEP common pitfalls.

- ◇ Children need their grief to be acknowledged and processed throughout their lifetime. A child who says, "You're not my mom, I don't have to listen to you"

is telling you about their sadness that Mom isn't here.

- ❖ Traditions celebrating holidays and special days should be maintained, when appropriate, while the new stepfamily creates some of their own unique traditions.
- ❖ Money matters can be confusing. Discuss how you will balance the responsibility of previous individual financial obligations while combining assets for the new family.

5 STEP THROUGH the wilderness with trust and determination.

- ❖ Remain dedicated to gradually forming a family identity over time, and everyone will be blessed.
- ❖ And remember, there is a honeymoon for couples in stepfamilies; it just comes at the end of the journey, not at the beginning!

6 STEP UP your faith. Spiritual resources help stepfamily members find grace for each other and strength for the journey. Also, a community of faith can support you along the way.



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