



Building Happy Step-Families

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Blending two families into one is both a challenging and rewarding journey! Here are some things to consider when your family has just expanded and you are struggling to make it all work.

ADJUST EXPECTATIONS

Often, everyone in a blended family has “ideal” expectations of how it will be. As real life sets in and a stepfamily begins to sort through issues of finances, schedules, discipline, values, ex-spouses, custody, attachment, etc., hurt and disappointment often set in as present reality does not meet former expectations. Take a moment to consider what expectation you had that wasn’t met. Remember, you can only control yourself and your actions, you can’t make anyone meet your expectations. By releasing family members from our expectations, less hurt and disappointment can be the result. Also, relax your expectations on yourself....step-families take time to blend!

MAKE RESPECT THE BOTTOM LINE

It’s hard to give respect....especially if you don’t always receive it. Even if you don’t approve of a behavior, it means you respect your stepchild as a person. As a blended family, you don’t have to always agree, do things the same way, or feel the same way about each other, but RESPECT is essential. In fact, we can be angry and still express that in a respectful way. Use words to express our feelings as in “I feel _____”, rather than blaming, shaming, yelling, or throwing things! Teach your children that respect for each other is a core family value.

COMMUNICATION IS THE KEY

In blended families, there is indeed a blending of two sets of rules, disciplines, and ways of functioning. If there isn’t a lot of discussion ahead of time about values, limits, and discipline, it can lead to significant conflict between parents down the road. Parental conflict is the single most thing that erodes the attachment in a blended family. Agreeing how you will discipline your kids—and coming up with a plan together—is a good way to go about getting on the same page. Communication between you and your mate is essential for a successful family, in any situation. Do you agree on parenting styles, discipline techniques, rules of the house and expectations? If you can talk about these things before joining a family together, that’s the best case scenario — but it’s never too late to start.

RELATIONSHIP BEFORE RULES

Try to assess how much time you are spending enforcing rules in your blended family, and how much time are you building relationship connection. If the rules outweighs the relationship, it’s time to “back up the truck” and focus on building secure connection between all family members. This could look like quality time spent together, trying a new hobby as a family, planning an adventure, or just sitting and listening to how your step-kids are feeling. Do you know their biggest challenges? Do you have a sense of their emotional needs? What about their love language? Make sure to build the relationship foundation first.

With care and attention to how a blended family works through expectations, respect, communication, and connection, you can navigate through the challenges and rewards of blending a new family together!