



Helping Children Adjust to Remarriage

Getting married – again – can be an exciting time for the adults and a precarious time for the kids involved. Doing some work upfront in preparing your children will go a long way towards a more peaceful transition. As most know, the failure rate of second marriages is even higher than first marriages. The rate of first marriages ending in divorce is between 40-60%, and second marriage failure rates are between 50 -70%! Children, ex-spouses, and money are the most common challenges of second marriages.

A child's adjustment to a blended family can be greatly enhanced by preparing the child in advance and beginning to make some changes before the marriage actually occurs. For example, it is not uncommon for single parents to sleep with their child or to lay down with their child each night. Marriage usually changes that pattern, therefore start helping your child sleep independently well in advance of the marriage, otherwise it will appear to a child that the new spouse has replaced him – and it's true! This feeling of being replaced will create resentment and frustration on the part of the child towards the new stepparent. Before the marriage occurs, a child may be very accepting of mom's boyfriend or dad's girlfriend and seem to really enjoy that extra person in his/her life. However, the relationship often changes after a marriage because that "extra" person never goes away! A child can't really grasp how mom's or dad's new spouse will change things until it actually happens.

Another important but sometimes difficult task is for you to remain the disciplinarian. Your new spouse should be in a supporting role while you must continue to correct, initiate consequences and follow through. Only in emergencies and when safety is at risk should your wife become the disciplinarian. Many new stepparents have the idea they are going to "set things right" in the family. That attitude will contribute to resentment and conflicts of loyalty between "original" family members and the stepparent. That is a road full of potholes!

Having a "date night" or "date day" *just* for you and your children on a weekly basis is a great way to stay connected and to check on how they is adjusting. Sometimes it helps to just give them the space to be able to say, "Daddy, I really miss the way things used to be when it was just us." Additionally, planning low key activities between the stepparent and your child(ren) can help to build a relationship separate from you. The relationship between a stepparent and stepchild usually evolves slowly and cannot or should not be rushed by the stepparent!

Lastly, know that blended families can take 2-5 years to solidify. It is normal for conflicts to occur and loyalties to be taxed. "The Brady Bunch" was not a reality show, so know that your new blended family may not ever feel quite like an original family. Finding a new sense of family and developing a respect across the generations is absolutely possible. Often it is helpful to seek a professional either for the parental unit together and/or for the child when navigating this new territory.

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