



# Blending Families

## *Hints for a Successful Transition*

With more than half of all marriages ending in divorce and the majority of divorced individuals finding new partners, the number of blended families is growing. Blended families encounter a whole range of challenging practical and emotional issues.

The process of combining two households and two sets of children can be less confusing if parents take time to deal with sensitive feelings and build new family relationships. Here are some suggestions for minimizing the confusion and stress that can accompany the formation of new families:



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### **Set ground rules.**

Discuss your concerns and feelings when you consider living with someone who also has children. Talk about practical issues such as who has authority over which kids and when and how visitation provisions will be accommodated. Encourage open communication and cooperation between all the adults involved, including former spouses.

New partners may bring to the marriage different ideas about disciplining children. One strategy that works for many blended families is for the new mate to refrain from disciplining the other's children until they can agree on a common set of expectations and a discipline style.

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### **Pay attention to feelings.**

A stepparent-stepchild relationship can foster all sorts of emotions, some wonderful, some not. Sometimes parents and children can subconsciously compete for the attention of the

other parent or vice versa. These feelings should be recognized but minimized. Competitive feelings may also emerge if one parent seems to favor his or her biological children. A situation like this can generate great hostility and should be confronted early on. Stepparents should avoid making negative statements about the absent biological parent in the presence of the children.

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### **Be friends first.**

Some stepparents who join a family are ecstatic to be the "instant" parents of children they adore. Their joy may quickly turn into frustration, however, when they find that their stepchildren are boiling over with anger, resentment and other challenging emotions. Other stepparents are disappointed when they don't feel instant pangs of love for their new stepchildren.

If you're a new stepparent, don't expect to love the stepchild right away or expect love in return. Instead, focus on building a

friendship based on mutual appreciation and respect. Although you'll be coparenting, don't expect to replace the missing parent in the child's heart. Get to know the child's likes and dislikes, hobbies and friends.

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### **Emphasize the positive aspects.**

A blended family offers many benefits that a traditional nuclear family does not. Members of a combined family can share new skills and interests with each other, learn new customs and rituals and have more diverse companionship within the household.

Despite the challenges involved in blending two families, when all family members can be honest about their feelings and work together, blended families offer opportunities to share a unique and special joy. It sometimes helps to emphasize these positive aspects of stepfamily relationships and to minimize or dispel the negative ones.