



STEP-FAMILIES

Blending the Familiar With the New

If your new partner has children, or if you both have children from previous marriages, the practical effects of blending two families may not be the ideal family you once imagined. Conflicts about discipline, money and jealousy can and do come up. Understand how children can feel in this situation and what you and your partner can do together to make the transition easier.

CHILDREN ARE INDIVIDUALS

You might be seeing your partner's children as part of the "package" that came with the relationship which you and your partner share, but children are individuals. Taking time with each child alone and getting to know the child as an individual will bring respect in return.

BE AWARE OF LOYALTY

Your step-children are very loyal to your partner and probably to your partner's former spouse. They might even feel that they're being disloyal by liking you. Try not to speak negatively about your partner or your partner's "ex," even if what you're saying is true. The children will hold it against you and it will be a barrier to communication.

ESTABLISH NEW SURROUNDINGS

Totally new surroundings or rearranging and perhaps painting the old will help establish the blended family as its own unit and start everyone off on an equal footing. Be aware, however, that older children may react negatively to this approach.

SETTLE DIFFERENCES PRIVATELY

If you and your partner have disagreements over how the children should behave, talk them out privately. If the situation seems unresolvable, the two of you might consider talking with a neutral third party such as a family counselor. Many emotional issues can be buried in the discussion of practical matters and clear communication can head off problems.

DON'T EXPECT TOO MUCH

Try to be realistic in your expectations of the situation. Expect support from your partner, but understand that, to a point, the transition to a new family can be difficult for children. Blending a family is a great balancing act.

