



Blended Families

As the formerly married marry again and bring their natural children into the new relationship, everyone involved is suddenly thrust into a new experience—the blended family. This occurs even if the children do not live in the same household with the parent who remarries.

And when a child's natural mother and father both remarry, he or she must then find a rightful place in two blended families—which include stepparents, stepsiblings, stepgrandparents, and others on both sides. Building and managing all these relationships can result in stress for everyone.

If children are born later of the new relationship, the blending takes on still another dimension. Meanwhile, the adults in the household also have one another to think of! This adds up to a tall order for anyone. But the blending can occur. Many parents and children attest to the success of their blended families when they really get involved in each other's lives. And that's what it takes— involvement.

Getting your blended family up and running may require a little help. Here are some of the ideas that might be useful and encouraging to you.

Talk Together

Communication breakdowns, hurt feelings, special needs, individual viewpoints, differing ages, temperaments, and backgrounds all play a part in the dynamics of living together. Loyalty conflicts spring up. Relationships are jealously guarded.

You can help yourself, your spouse, and most of all your children with an exercise called Heart Talks that will stimulate and encourage everyone in your family to express—in a safe environment—what's bothering them.

Cut out a paper heart from construction paper. Then on a poster board, list the following partial sentences about family life (or make up your own):

- I feel angry when...
- I'm unhappy when...
- I wish our family didn't have to...
- I don't like it when...
- I feel left out when...

Sit in a circle on the floor. Model a few sentences so the children will hear how to share their feelings responsibly. For example, it would be okay to say, "I feel angry when Jenny plays with my dolls without asking me first." It would not be okay to say, "I feel angry when dumb Jenny trashes my dolls when I'm not around to stop her."

Start with one person holding the heart. Invite that person to choose a phrase from the list and to finish it out loud. Then pass the heart to the next person and so on.

Afterward ask family members to repeat at least one message they heard during the exercise and to offer a solution, if one is called for, or to give a word of encouragement.

Keep Some Old Customs and Create Some New Ones

As parents of a blended family you have an opportunity to initiate new customs, but also keep the old ones alive, so the children especially will not lose touch with their roots. Allow the children to decorate the family Christmas tree in stages. In the first two stages, each child or children and the natural parent share memories as they decorate together. In the third stage, the blended family decorates together.

Play Together

Games, sporting events and picnics are all good ways to relax and play together. In addition, look for opportunities to connect that are fun, but somewhat unusual. This will surprise and delight your kids and show them in a new way how much you value them.

Learn Together

Give yourselves the gift of learning and growing together—one parent and one child at a time, or as a group, depending on the size of your family and the ages of your children. Focus on learning skills you can practice and participate in together.

Pray Together

Every family can benefit from spiritual support. But what do you do when religious traditions, practices, and viewpoints differ somewhat among family members? For example, the new parents may be practicing Christians. But the parents in the other home may not be, or they may practice a faith you cannot condone. Yet you don't want to undermine those parents in the eyes of your/their children.

Start by setting a standard for your blended family. When you're together in your house you go to church, pray at meals, pray before bed, read Scripture as a family. The children will quickly recognize and respect this routine. It's what's done in this home. When they visit their other parents, release them to the Lord's care, trusting he will guard their minds and hearts. Pray for their safety and well-being while they're gone. Embrace them lovingly when they return.

By putting these ideas and more into action you will create and nurture a strong base of love and mutual acceptance within your blended family.

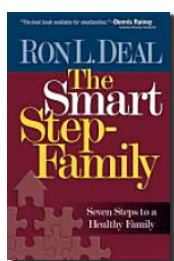


RELATED SCRIPTURE

"For I am the Lord, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you" (Isaiah 41:13).



RELATED RESOURCES



The Smart Stepfamily

Ron Deal

ISBN 978-0764201592

Ron Deal provides seven effective, achievable steps toward building a healthy marriage and a workable and peaceful stepfamily. Exploding the myth of achieving a "blended family" he helps

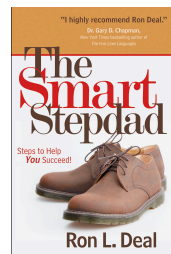
parents recognize the unique personality and place of each family member, honor the families of origin while establishing new traditions, and much more. Developed from Deal's nationwide seminars on the topic, this material is equally useful for individuals, families, small groups, pastors, and counselors.



The Smart Stepmom

Ron Deal and Laura Petherbridge
ISBN 978-0764207020

The stepmother's role often is ambiguous and under appreciated, and frequently it carries unrealistic expectations. This book answers women's concerns and questions, including: How can I be a caretaker and a key emotional connector in the family if the children don't accept my influence? How should I cope with children who are confused about their family and torn between loyalty to their biological mother and me? When should I step back in conflicts and when should I insist that my husband stand up for me? In addition it addresses the spiritual and emotional climate of the home, providing perspective and guidelines to help stepmothers and their families thrive.



The Smart Stepdad

Ron Deal

ISBN 978-0764206962

While resources abound for stepmothers, stepfathers are often left to travel a difficult road without clear directions. Ron Deal offers advice for men navigating the stepfamily minefield, including how to connect with stepchildren, being a godly role model, how to discipline, dealing with the biological dad, and keeping the bond strong with one's new spouse. He gives perspective on what the kids are going through and why things don't work the same as in a biological family. The Smart Stepdad provides essential guidelines to help stepfathers not only survive but succeed as both dad and husband.

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