

**Blended Families Parenting Class
Extra Content for Class #1&2**

Examine and resolve relations with your family of origin.

“Ideally the important psychological task of cutting loose from your parents will have been completed before your marriage or remarriage. If this is not the case, you may find that many of your present approaches and responses are rooted in your relationship with your first family, the one into which you were born. Problems you blamed on your former spouse may be recurring in your new marriage: you may now begin to see that you are still repeating behavior based on early ties and struggles with your parents.

We are who we are, either in harmony with our parents or in reaction to them.

Childhood memories, conflicts, and feelings continue to affect all our relationships.

Two negative reactions commonly carried into adulthood are the need for parental approval and the desire to banish in us traits unpleasantly associated with parents. Once you begin to see that old fears, ways of thinking, or insecurities are repeating themselves in your life, you may decide to release this emotional backlog through counseling or self – help books.

Two excellent books on this subject are MAKING PEACE WITH YOUR PARENTS, by Bloomfield and Fender and CUTTING LOOSE: AN ADULT GUIDE TO COMING TO TERMS WITH YOUR PARENTS by Halpern. The approach that you take matters less than the fact that you choose to leave negative parental influences behind you. Resolving old conflicts with parents will help reduce struggles in current relationships and may in fact be the most important investment that you make for the future of your stepfamily.

It’s important to understand too, though, that coming to terms with your parents may result in radical changes within you. As you leave negative feelings behind, you may disturb or confuse your mate by responding differently in familiar situations. This in turn could alter and possibly disrupt your marriage relationship. If the couple commitment is strong, however, personal growth work that helps you become a healthier person can also help strengthen your marriage.”

Family Rules

As infants and young children we are **taught a set of expectations for behavior**. The expectations are designed to keep the family functioning in the way that it has been. These expectations are called **family rules** and are not usually written down or talked about as a set of rules. They are usually so embedded in the family system that the family sometimes doesn't recognize that the rules have been formulated and reinforced. They **ARE** the family. . . how the family sees itself and identifies its members. The family experiences the rules as **THE** way of life. The movement toward maintaining the status quo through the rules and subsequent enforcement is called **homeostasis**. The expectations associated with homeostasis are usually taught by;

a) **modeling** (we observe the actions of our parents. . . the old adage that "Actions speak louder than words" is an example of this)

b) **direct teaching** (we are explicitly told that we should or ought to act in a certain way)

c) **emotional/physical reinforcement** (this can be experienced in both pleasant or aversive ways. Someone can tell us that we did a wonderful job or we can be shamed with words like, "why aren't you as smart as your brother?" With either technique we are being reinforced to behave in a certain way.)

This set of expectations can be imagined as a script that we refer to as a guide for how to interpret our experiences. This interpretation of an experience produces the meaning that we attach to it, and ultimately how and what we think results in how we feel about the situation.

Here are some suggestions that might be helpful in doing family of origin work.

1. **Make a list of what you believe your "family rules" were. Remember that this how you experienced your family when you were younger than 10 years old. Do the best you can to remember what it was like back then. Not how you see your family now. (although some of what you feel in the present is based on the family rules)**
2. **Think about how these family rules affect the way in which you perceive and act in your marriage and family interactions.**
3. **List 10 early childhood memories, which are concrete, specific and detailed. A memory like, "I remember we were always poor" is probably not going to be as useful as "I remember one Saturday morning. . ."**
4. **Look for themes or patterns in your rules and memories that might help you see how and why you parent/react the way you do in a blended family setting.**
5. **Write a 3 page paper on what areas of your parenting are presently effective as well as areas that you feel you want to change.**
6. **Go to lunch with your partner/friend and DISCUSS what you are thinking/feeling about these ideas, ask for feedback and work hard to be non-defensive.**