Agenda

Review and Discussion:

1. Blended Family Stages
   a. Fantasy
   b. Confusion
   c. Crazy Time
   d. Stability
   e. Commitment

2. Blended Family Stage Tasks- what needs to happen to move through

3. Family Meetings – vital in Blended Families

4. Basic characteristics of becoming more effective:
   a. Ability to empathize
   b. Not be defensive
   c. Avoids being judgmental
   d. Shows acceptance
   e. Open to change/new information
   f. Strong sense of personal identity
   g. Believes in children’s abilities/encourages them

5. Blended Family Struggles
   a. Need to be noticed
      1. Parents seek recognition from stepchildren
      2. Stepparents want recognition from their stepchildren’s absent parent
      3. A stepparent needs a spouse’s emotional support
   b. Competition, the creator of conflict
   c. Responsibility, personal and legal
   d. Instant love?
   e. Struggling with sexuality
      1. Children live with newlyweds
      2. Boundaries are blurred
   f. Discipline dilemma
      1. When the stepparent is the only one home
2. When a child’s misbehavior is directed only toward the stepparent

The Stepchildren’s Internal Conflicts
Most children in blended families struggle with three basic emotions and have difficulty with the consequences of feeling and/or expressing these emotions. Parents might become more effective by understanding how children experience these common consequences of going through a divorce and then living in a blended family. Think of the ways that children might experience the following:

a. anger
b. guilt
c. fear

Guidelines for the healing process
1. Be aware of all the changes in which the children did not have control/be sensitive to their feelings
2. Ease into the newness of the blended family/uncertainty is normal
3. Be patient & answer questions honestly
4. Accept grief & loss as part of life/encourage children to face the reality of these losses, work toward empathy not pity
5. Encourage children's relationship with the biological parent, NEVER undermine that relationship
6. Show encouragement, touch, hug and hold your children
7. Confront misbehavior and take corrective action/do not make excuses

II. Coping with a New Stepparent
a. Names... what do you call each other
b. Roles
1. Recognize the importance of the other biological parent and respect the child's need to love that parent
2. NEVER SPEAK NEGATIVELY OF THE OTHER PARENT IN FRONT OF THE CHILDREN
3. Acknowledge the bond between your new mate and their children/avoid monopolizing your spouses time
4. Plan alone time/date nights with your stepchildren
5. Family life isn't always happy/conflict is ok (look at HOW)
6. Don't expect instant love/allow time for development
7. Reject fairy tale myths and unrealistic media portrayals of blended families. FORGIVE YOURSELF FOR BEING IMPERFECT!!!

III. Coping with differences
   a. Differences at home
   b. Differences between homes
   c. Non-custodial parent
   d. Love vs. stuff
   e. Schools
   f. Stepsiblings
      1. Rivalry (competition vs. cooperation)
      2. Birth order reshuffled

IV. Blended family meetings
   a. Set time and be consistent (day, time, place) 60 minutes
   b. Agenda, (20 minutes=moan/groan, 20 minutes=scheduling, goals, 20 minutes=encouragement)
   c. Conflict resolution process
      1. Identify the issue
      2. Brainstorm possible solutions
      3. Evaluate the solutions and choose one
      4. Try out the solution
      5. Evaluate in the next meeting

Session 4 Study Questions
1. As children struggle to find their place in a blended family, what are some of the feelings that they cope with?
2. How can you help children to trust again?
3. What the major dilemmas stepchildren face? How can you best help them?

4. What is the biggest problem that your children/stepchildren face with their nonresidential parent? What is your part in it?

5. How can you influence schools to be a positive force in the lives of your children and stepchildren.

6. What causes stepchildren to compete with each other?

7. What techniques would be beneficial to create a feeling of belonging for children in your blended family?

8. Why are family meetings so essential to the effective functioning of a blended family?

9. Why might some parents be resistant to having meetings?