

**Antelope Springs
Blended Family Parenting Class
Session 7**

Agenda

1. Discussion

- a. Birth order issues
- b. Loyalty conflicts
- c. Dilemma's for children; anger/guilt/fear

2. How children adjust to blended families

Kids of different ages and genders will adjust differently to a blended family. The physical and emotional needs of a 2 year old girl are different than those of a 13 year old boy, but don't mistake differences in development and age for differences in fundamental needs. Just because a teenager may take a long time accepting your love and affection doesn't mean that he doesn't want it. You will need to adjust your approach with different age levels and genders, but your goal of establishing a trusting relationship is the same.

Young children
under 10

- May adjust more easily because they thrive on cohesive family relationships.
- Are more accepting of a new adult.
- Feel competitive for their parent's attention.
- Have more daily needs to be met.

Adolescents
aged 10-14

- May have the most difficult time adjusting to a stepfamily.
- Need more time to bond before accepting a new person as a disciplinarian.
- May not demonstrate their feelings openly, but may be as sensitive, or more sensitive, than young children when it comes to needing love, support, discipline and attention.

Teenagers 15 or
older

- May have less involvement in stepfamily life.
- Prefer to separate from the family as they form their own identities.
- Also may not be open in their expression of affection or sensitivity, but still want to feel important, loved and secure.

Gender Differences – general tendencies:

- Both boys and girls in stepfamilies tend to prefer verbal affection, such as praises or compliments, rather than physical closeness, like hugs and kisses.
- Girls tend to be uncomfortable with physical displays of affection from their stepfather.
- Boys seem to accept a stepfather more quickly than girls.

2. Job chart basics

- a. Initial set-up, materials

- b. Preparing the chart
 - c. Distribution
 - d. Monitoring keys
 - e. Accountability
3. Family Contract Basics
- a. Overview of structure
 - b. Presentation
 - c. Content issues
 - d. Accountability
 - e. Re-evaluation
4. Family Meeting Set-up
- a. Moan/groan
 - b. Scheduling
 - c. Validation

What makes a successful blended family?

From "I Do, Take Two"

Trying to make a blended family a replica of your first family, or the ideal nuclear family, can often set family members up for confusion, frustration, and disappointment. Instead, embrace the differences and consider the basic elements that make a successful blended family:

- Solid marriage. Without the marriage, there is no family. It's harder to take care of the marriage in a blended family because you don't have couple time like most first marriages do. You'll have to grow and mature into the marriage while parenting.
- Being civil. If family members can be civil with one another on a regular basis rather than ignoring, purposely trying to hurt, or completely withdrawing from each other, you're on track.
- All relationships are respectful. This is not just referring to the kids' behavior toward the adults. Respect should be given not just based on age, but based on the fact that you are all family members now.

- Compassion for everyone's development. Members of your blended family may be at various life stages and have different needs (teens versus toddlers, for example). They may also be at different stages in accepting this new family. Family members need to understand and honor those differences.
- Room for growth. After a few years of being blended, hopefully the family will grow and members will choose to spend more time together and feel closer to one another.

Strengthening a blended family

One challenge to creating a cohesive blended family is establishing trust. The children may feel uncertain about their new family and resist your efforts to get to know them. Learn not to take their lack of enthusiasm (and other negative attitudes) personally. It isn't that they don't want you to be happy; they just don't know what it will be like to share their parent with a new spouse, let alone his or her kids. These feelings are normal.

Create clear, safe boundaries in blended families

An important part of building trust in a family has to do with discipline. Couples should discuss the role each step-parent will play in raising their respective children, as well as changes in household rules.

The following tips can help make this difficult transition a bit smoother:

- Establish the step-parent as more of a friend or counselor rather than a disciplinarian.
- Let the biological parent remain primarily responsible for discipline until the step-parent has developed solid bonds with the kids.
- Create a list of family rules. Discuss the rules with the children and post them in a prominent place. Try to understand what the rules and boundaries are for the kids in their other residence, and, if possible, be consistent.

Keep ALL parents involved

Children will adjust better to the blended family if they have access to both biological parents. It is important if all parents are involved and work toward a parenting partnership.

- Let the kids know that you and your ex-spouse will continue to love them and be there for them throughout their lives.
- Tell the kids that your new spouse will not be a 'replacement' mom or dad, but another person to love and support them.

Communicate often and openly in blended families

The way a blended family communicates says a lot about the level of trust between family members. When communication is clear, open, and frequent, there are fewer opportunities for misunderstanding and more possibilities for connection, whether it is between parent and child, step-parent and stepchild, or between stepsiblings.

Uncertainty and worry about family issues often comes from poor communication. It might be helpful to set up some 'house rules' for communication within a blended family, such as:

- Listen respectfully to one another.
- Address conflict positively.
- Establish an open and nonjudgmental atmosphere.
- Do things together – games, sports, activities.

- Show affection to one another comfortably.

Use routines and rituals to bond blended families

Creating family routines and rituals helps unite family members. Decide on meaningful family rituals and plan to incorporate at least one into your blended family. They might include Sunday visits to the beach, a weekly game night, or special ways to celebrate a family birthday.

Establishing regular family meals, for example, offers a great chance for you to talk and bond with your children and stepchildren as well as encourage healthy eating habits.

Tips for a healthy blended family

- All brothers and sisters “fall out”, so don’t assume all family arguments are the result of living in a blended family.
- Beware of favoritism. Be fair. Don’t overcompensate by favoring your stepchildren. This is a common mistake, made with best intentions, in an attempt to avoid indulging your biological children.
- Communicate, communicate, communicate. Be sure to discuss everything. Never keep emotions bottled up or hold grudges.
- Make special arrangements. If some of the kids “just visit,” make sure they have a locked cupboard for their personal things. Bringing toothbrushes and other “standard fare” each time they come to your home makes them feel like a visitor, not a member of the blended family.
- Find support. Locate a step-parenting support organization in your community. You can learn how other blended families address some of the challenges of blended families.
- Spend time every day with your child. Try to spend at least one “quiet time” period with your child (or children) daily. Even in the best of blended families, children still need to enjoy some “alone time” with each parent.