

Creating New Relationships

BLENDED FAMILIES

*As 7 out of 10 divorced Canadians remarry,
the number of blended families continues to grow.*

A blended family is formed when a couple with children from past marriages come together. The cornerstone of the stepfamily is the couple's commitment to one another. The challenge for blended families is one of moving on to a new family identity.

**A new family identity requires
both the creation of a solid couple bond and new parenting relationships.**

Building A Solid Couple Bond

- **Stay focused, do not lose track of your partner.** Remember, an important ingredient in a blended family is the couple's relationship. Many overlook that this is the reason for getting together in the first place. The couple's bond is the foundation of the blended family and needs to be strong. Strengthening a couple's relationship will require love, respect, friendship and teamwork.
- **Be equal partners in the relationship.** You must be willing to share even the difficult aspects of co-parenting, providing support for one another even when faced with frustrating challenges.
- **Have a contingency plan, a retreat for one-on-one strategy meetings with your spouse.** Map out a strategy for a time out where you can have the space and time for exchanging ideas and edicts. Err on the side of keeping the communication lines open.
- **Make each other feel as secure as possible.** Members of blended families start out with a lot of insecurities. Increase common interests. Do not be afraid to build trust by trial and error.
- **Deal with emotional pain and loss.** Couples who form a blended family have a need to heal the emotional wound as they work through their shock and denial, anger and depression, and finally an understanding and acceptance of their loss of the previous relationship.
- **Act like civilized mature adults with your ex-spouse keeping in mind the emotional health of your children.** Your new relationship will include expectations of your previous relationships. Verbal nastiness directed at the ex-spouse in front of the children is unhealthy. However, experts advise that you do not have to be buddies, either.



Creating New Parenting Relationships

- **Focus on establishing caring and open communication with your stepchildren**, rather than be worrying about loving them. Well-meaning and over-anxious stepparents expect instant love to happen. This is a myth.
- **Decide together whether or not to put the children's interests ahead of your own.** The couple should decide this at the very start of the relationship.
- **You must trust each other with your children.** If you do not, the relationship is not going to work.
- **Do not as a stepparent expect to replace the children's biological parents.** This expectation can cause you to be hurt. Try not to replace a stepchild's birthparent. Rather, encourage the child to have the best possible relationship with you.
- **If feasible, encourage the children to have the best possible relationship with the other birth parent.** At the same time start out as that special friend and then let things evolve into a parenting role.
- **Find things you like about a stepchild.** Focus on these. Be prepared to give generous doses of compliments and positive reinforcement.
- **Recognize that discipline is a sensitive issue.** Disciplining a child can be difficult especially when the stepparent is told- *You cannot tell me what to do. You're not my mother (father).* To this challenge there is no easy solution.
- **Negotiate how you will discipline each other's children.** Couples need to agree before marriage that the natural parent has to support the stepparent in discipline issues even when the stepparent is making a mistake. Ease into disciplining gently. Refer to the biological parent at early stages- *Your father asked me to..... Then gradually introduce yourself- Your dad and I will be happy if...*
- **Trust your partner to fix a mistake as would a natural parent.** All parents make mistakes. Trust each other that a decision is made in the best interest of the child.
- **Present a united front to the children.** If stepparents present a united front, a sense of security follows. Avoid risking frustration by not succumbing to the old divide and conquer technique.
- **Keep disagreements for later.** If as stepparents you have to argue you should do so in private. Disagreements can always be discussed without the presence of the children.
- **Lighten up!** Step-parenting will require flexibility, humour, and tolerance. Be prepared to ease up on restrictions in a positive way. Children and adults learn from negotiating restrictions quicker than any other situations.



The good news is that the blended family can work!

A blended family brings a richness & diversity to its members and a variety of lifestyles, opinions, and enriching relationships.

A solid couple bond & new satisfying parenting relationships helps you to move on.