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Education

Stepparenting or Blended Families

Most divorced men and women under the age of 45 remarry within 3 to 4 years of divorcing. People with children tend to remarry sooner than those without children. When people remarry and blend families, it can be challenging. Here are some suggestions that might help.

- **Talk about things before you remarry.** Talk openly with your children and future spouse about what they expect and what they fear. Ask each of them how they picture future family life. You may be able to calm some fears, but it is realistic to expect some tough times ahead. Let everyone know that they probably will feel awkward around one another and that it will take time to adjust to the changes.
- **Agree on a type of discipline.** Agree on setting limits and how to discipline children before the wedding. When you first blend families, it is usually best for the natural parent to discipline the children. In this way, child and stepparent are not set up for fights and hurt feelings. As the relationship between child and stepparent grows, co-parenting becomes more realistic. Both parents need to be consistent when disciplining children.
- **Keep your marriage strong.** Remember that what began this family was a caring relationship. A strong bond between you and your new spouse is important. While parenting will be a challenge, don't let your marriage suffer. Spend time together away from the children. Plan a weekend getaway or meet for lunch or dinner. The stronger your marriage is, the better you will be able to face the challenges of the new family.
- **Start new traditions.** Some traditions will be kept from each family, but one way to build stronger relationships is to start new traditions. Children may spend traditional holidays with another parent, and you may need to do extra planning to keep stress levels down. Everyday traditions such as hugs before school, pizza nights, or notes in a lunch box are important too. They show care and commitment. Mix traditions that everyone is used to with comfortable new ones.
- **Have weekly meetings.** A weekly meeting will help your family talk to each other and make family goals. Make meeting rules and figure out a way in which all family members can freely express themselves in these meetings.
- **Spend time every day with your child.** Try to spend quality time with children every day. Plan individual activities with each child, whether natural or step. Spending time one-on-one helps you talk about things that might not come up in front of other family members. It also helps you get to know each other better. It can also be calming and reassuring.
- **Find support.** Locate a support group in your area. You can learn how other families are addressing some of the challenges of blended families. Health care providers or mental health professionals can help if serious problems develop. They can also answer questions you may have about blending a family.

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