
Raising children in a blended family

Marriages with blended families tend to be very unsuccessful, one of the greatest predictors of divorce. It is common for each spouse to put their own children's interests first. It is often in an effort to compensate for the trauma children experience when there is a divorce. But when the children's interests are first, the interests of the other spouse and the other spouse's children are found somewhere down the list, and that's a formula for marital disaster.

However, these marriages can be saved if both spouses are willing to follow a Policy of Joint Agreement (never do anything without an enthusiastic agreement between you and your spouse). In effect, whenever you follow this policy, you put your spouse's interests first, where they should be.

Following this policy means that neither you nor your spouse act to reprimand or discipline any child until you have reached an enthusiastic agreement about it. **At first, you may not agree about much of anything**, in which case you are not to discipline the children (they may do whatever they please). But as you practice applying the policy, you and your spouse will begin to establish guidelines in child-rearing issues, and agreements will start to form. **Eventually, you will agree on how to discipline your children in a way that takes each other's feelings into account, and your marriage will be saved.**

Child rearing is a huge problem in blended families, but it's not the only issue in your marriage. Regardless of your conflicts, however, you'll find out that you can resolve them all when you have learned to negotiate with the Policy of Joint Agreement. Here are a few guidelines that will help you negotiate an enthusiastic agreement:

1. Set ground rules to make negotiations pleasant and fair
 - a. Try to be pleasant and cheerful through your discussion of the issue.
 - b. Put safety first - do not threaten to cause pain or suffering when you negotiate, even if your spouse makes threatening remarks or negotiations fail. If you reach an impasse, stop for a while and come back to the issue later.
2. Identify the problem from the perspectives of both you and your spouse. **Be able to state the other spouse's position before you go on to find a solution.**
3. Brainstorm solutions with abandon. Spend some time thinking of all sorts of ways to handle the problem, and don't correct each other when you hear of a plan that you don't like. You'll have a change to do that later.

Choose the solution that is appealing to both of you. And if your brainstorming has not given you an answer that you can enthusiastically agree upon, go back to brainstorming.

The reason that you argue is that you are incompatible - **you have not learned how to act in the interest of both of you at the same time.** But if you follow the Policy of Joint Agreement and use the guidelines for negotiations, you will find yourselves in greater and greater agreement. Eventually, your marriage will turn out better than you could have ever hoped.

If you don't follow this policy, however, you will eventually make each other so miserable that you will lose your love for each other and divorce, like most marriages with blended families. This process has already begun. Stop it before it goes any further.