

Raising children in a Blended Family

By Craig Miller

Raising children with blended families can be a challenge and parents are rarely prepared for knowing how to raise children that are not biologically related. One of the biggest problems is that the parents have one expectation and the children have another. First of all, the parents typically come together because they choose each other. As a result the parents mistakenly assume the children will simply accept the step-parent in the same way they did. However, the child's traumatic experiences of losing their original family often become of lesser importance when the parents are busy creating a new life after their own traumatic experience. These family situations can be improved if both spouses are willing to learn how to have "Agreements." An Agreement means, never do anything without a cooperative Agreement between the spouses. In effect, whenever you follow this Agreement, you put your spouse's interests first, where they should be.

For example, the Agreement means that you both talk about what and how you will raise your children in the areas of: discipline, curfews, play activities, homework, bed time, chores, appropriateness of language, respect, TV viewing, etc. This will mean the parents are to spend private time talking and writing down what you agree with. Since this is a process, you will be spending time together before problems happen (proactive approach) and after problems happen (reactive approach) throughout the years raising the children. The more proactive time you spend together the less stressed you will be with the children, the more supported you will feel from your spouse, and the happier your home will be. If your schedule does not allow for time together or you do not know how to talk and agree about these issues, you will struggle with raising your children and are looking at a marital disaster.

Child rearing does not have to be a struggle in blended families or affect your marriage. Regardless of your conflicts, if you take the time to talk to your spouse about the Agreements, you will find the ability to work out what happens before the problems start. Here are a few guidelines that will encourage more productive Agreements:

1. Each take turns giving your perspective on one issue at a time. Be able to state the other spouse's position before you go on to find a solution.
2. Brainstorm solutions. 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. Be able to state the other spouse's solution before you decide on a final solution.
3. Choose parts of 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 have not learned how to act in the interest of your spouse.
4. If you reach an impasse, stop for a while and come back to the issue or solution later.
5. Be encouraging and cheerful without put downs, sarcasm, or hurtful comments.
6. Seek other resources or activities that can have a positive and healthy influence on you and your children. For example, attending church activities, reading material or attending a parenting seminar.

As you use these guidelines you will be able to find more ways to work together as parents. As a result, you will experience fewer struggles with raising your children. If there continues to be disagreements, frequent arguing, hurtful comments, poor relationship or communication with members in the family I recommend you seek professional counseling to resolve the issues.

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