

## **The Blended Family**

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Remember The Brady Bunch? America's first popularized blended family was beamed to us over the television screen, projecting an image of two once fragmented families finding happiness in a new unified family. But are today's real blended families as eerily perfect as the televised version? Today, at least one-third of children in the U.S. are expected to live in a stepfamily. Children in a blended family have usually suffered the loss of a parent from death or are in a divorced home situation. There has been loss and grief but their new 'blended' parents have fallen in love, decided to remarry and join children from their first marriages.

Many lifestyle adjustments and changes have to be navigated when a blended family is formed. I remember a friend of mine's son once told his mother, "I like it when we are all together as a family, but I miss time being alone with you." To spend alone time with each child is probably the most important thing a parent or new stepparent can remember to do. There is a period of adjustment that after a divorce or a remarriage that each person in the family will go through. It is a myth that love will flow instantly and seamlessly between stepchildren and their stepparent. The adjustment time will be easier if you have realistic expectations about the time needed to develop friendship and trust.

One of the other questions I have heard often in my practice is, "Should the biological parent remain primarily responsible for control and discipline of the child or children?" This is primarily a question that is for that adjusting period when the stepchildren are building trust and friendship with the new stepparent. The stepparents can take on more responsibilities in this area later. Most importantly the parents need to work together!

When change happens in a family like divorce or remarriage, invite questions and discussion. Establishing new family traditions for the blended family is a nice way to bond and have fun. Make sure the children know that they will continue to have a relationship with their non-residential parent. As you allow bonds to evolve slowly and naturally, your children will be able to be flexible and adjust to the new schedules and new people living in their homes. Nurture your marriage! Don't forget about spending alone time with your new partner no matter how difficult a time the children are having adjusting. Being united and connected as a couple will provide a safe and loving environment for all your children.