

Solve the 4 Biggest Problems Blended Families Face

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Many remarriages involve children who are thrust into a world of “steps”—stepmothers, stepfathers, step-siblings, step-grandparents. As of 2019, more than 3.9 million children lived in a household with a stepparent in the United States. Once a rarity in American culture, blended families are now common.

Of course, becoming a stepfamily isn't always easy. Bringing two families together under one roof can be quite challenging. Even for the most prepared, growing pains will likely occur when two families merge.

Don't expect your families to meld together overnight. According to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, it can take one to two years for blended families to adjust to the changes. But parents who are proactive in reducing and addressing potential problems can make the adjustment period smoother.

¹ Sibling Rivalry



Rob and Julia Campbell / Stocksy United

The issue: It's hard enough for a child to compete with siblings in a nuclear family. When it's step-siblings that they're not entirely comfortable with yet, the problem can magnify. For a child who hasn't had to share a parent in a long time, that adjustment period might be a little bit longer.

How to solve it: First, talk to your spouse so you're on the same page about [sibling rivalry](#). Nothing will work if one of you blames the other person's biological child for causing the rift. If you have different disciplinary styles, you're also likely to encounter problems.

[Consequences](#) and [rewards](#) need to be the same for all the children, no matter how it used to work before you two got married.

Next, remember that in some way, your kids may be more like strangers than siblings. So don't expect everyone to be one big happy family in the beginning. It will take a while to get to that point.

If there was a change-up in birth order—that is, one child who was previously the oldest is now stuck in the middle—acknowledge the resentment that could cause. The previously eldest child probably felt like they had a little bit of power that's now been taken away from them, while the former baby of the house might feel like they've lost the attention they once had.

Avoid placing labels on your kids as well. Even positive labels like, "She's the musician in our family," and "He's our star athlete," can increase tension among family members. Point out that everyone has many skills and talents and it's healthy to keep exploring new areas of interest.

2 Kids' Need for Attention

The issue: When the number of children increases, as it frequently does in blended families, one or all the children might feel like they're not getting the attention that they're used to.

Additionally, blended families sometimes have less time and money for each child's extracurricular activities or for family outings because of the increase in family size.

How to solve it: As with so many other issues, this problem can be resolved—to the best of its ability, anyway—by working together as a family. Create a set schedule that everyone has weighed in on, with each child choosing an activity within a certain budget throughout the month.

Additionally, both adults should attend each child's activities, such as sporting games, plays, or concerts, so it doesn't feel like any child is being favored over another.

Give each child individual attention as well. Whether you play a quick game together for 10 minutes every day or you schedule a once-a-month outing, giving biological children and stepchildren plenty of [positive attention](#) can strengthen your bond.

³ Stepparent Discipline

The issue: Whereas once the biological parent's boyfriend or girlfriend was someone to have fun with, now they're an authority figure—and that might cause a few problems in the household.

How to solve it: A family meeting is in order, but first sit down with your partner to [determine your household rules](#). Take notes and write down your rules and the consequences for breaking those rules.

If you both have children already, there's a good chance you have somewhat different rules. So it's important to come together to create the same rules for everyone so that you don't [live like two separate families under one roof](#).

Identify [how you're going to discipline](#) and what type of consequences you're going to use. It's imperative that the two of you [present a united front on disciplinary issues](#). Sometimes, one parent wants to be the “fun one.” At other times, one parent hopes the new stepparent can lay down the law and get things on track fast.

Coming together as a blended family means both parents need to work together as a team.

Remember, kids quickly learn who the “easy target” is when it comes to getting their way, and they can grow to be masters of manipulation to pit one adult against another.

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Next, call everyone to the table. Take out those notes that you jotted down, and go over them as a family.

Your young ones might have some thoughts that they want to contribute, and having it all written down means that everyone will know exactly what the household rules are, as well as the consequences for breaking those rules.

Explain to the children that, in your house, both adults can enforce consequences to any of the children, and it's expected that the children will obey the stepparent as they would any other authority figure.

With all of that said, it's important for stepparents to focus more on building a bond rather than disciplining the children initially. Without a healthy relationship, discipline won't work. This is especially true with adolescents.

Related: [How Can You Get Your Children to Listen to You?](#)

⁴ Lack of Family Bonds

The issue: You and your new spouse want to feel like one unit that can have fun, share, and rely on each other. The kids aren't entirely comfortable with each other though, nor with their new stepparent. It feels like you're still acting as two families that just happen to live in the same house.

How to solve it: You can't forge a bond overnight. It will take to time gain shared history, figure out new relationships, and adapt to the new normal.

Start the process slowly by beginning new traditions as a family. They might be reading a book together every night in the big bed in the master bedroom or taking a family walk around the neighborhood every Sunday morning before breakfast.

You can also smooth the transition of going from house to house, a process that might happen regularly if you or your spouse have [joint custody](#). For example, you could stop for ice cream or a quick visit to the playground every time you pick up the kids from the other parent's house. This little tradition signals to the kids that it's time to move into a different routine, but in a fun manner.

It's also important to give kids time to grieve. While a new marriage can be happy, it also signals the end of the previous family dynamics. And that can be tough for kids who are still struggling to deal with the fact that their [biological parents are no longer together](#) or that their time of being an only child with heaps of attention has come to an end.

A Word From Verywell

Despite problems, a blended family is still just that—a family. Although there might be growing pains, squabbles, and a few moments of discipline, everyone will eventually adjust to the new situation. Mistakes will be made, by children and by adults, but everyone will learn from those mistakes.

Eventually, the household will feel less like a mish-mash of families and more like one solid unit. Creating a functioning blended family is hard work that takes time, but the resulting bonds are worthy of the effort and will last a lifetime.

Related: [How to Foster Strong Bonds in Stepfamilies](#)

Article Sources

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