

# PRESSING ON...

"I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:14



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## Unity vs Division: Moving Ahead

■ by Debi Mitchell, MS, LMFT

Unity means oneness or harmony. The world longs for unity, yet we frequently create discord instead. We go off-pitch or sing an entirely different song.

Unity requires at least two. Both must be moving toward the same healthy goal to achieve positive unity, yet we control only our own choices. We risk conflict and rejection. So why try?

We practice more unity-driven skills when we understand division's costs and unity's importance.

### Division's Costs

We focus on hurts, grudges, or slights. Internally, we grow more negative. Resentment, bitterness, and pain occur. We might gossip, argue, or cultivate prejudice. We develop differing levels of division: isolation to active alienation. We feel good for a moment-- self-righteous, powerful-- but present and future generations suffer the effects.



Division injures our S.O.N.:

- Self,
- Others, and
- Nations.

### Self

We frequently develop conflicting beliefs, thoughts, and feelings. These internal divisions harm us physically, mentally, and emotionally. They cause stress. Anger. Depression. Loneliness. Stressors affect our immune system and cause heart disease, cancer, and more.

Our spirits' damages cost most. God desires unity, yet we create barriers. Fear vs. forgiveness damages our relationship with God (*Matthew 6:15*). Our pride brings God's judgment (*James 2:1-13, 3:14-16*). The list continues.

### Others

Self-conflicts create external divisions. James writes: "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? ...so you quarrel and fight" (*James 4:1-2*).

We want our own way and experience marital problems. Home conflict causes children pain. Children's entitlement and anger demoralizes teachers.

### Nations

Jesus stated: "...Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand." (*Matthew 12:25b, NIV*).

The United States' last presidential election increased an already "Divided States" downward spiral. Like ancient Israel, we continue by doing what is "right in our own eyes." We also suffer similar consequences - divided "tribes" (*Judges 17:6, 21:25*).

### Unity's Importance

Psalms reads: "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity" (*Psalms 133:1*).

God considers unity important (*1 Corinthians 1:10, Philippians 2:1-3*). Jesus' prayer reiterated a fervent desire for believers' unity. Through it, the world sees Jesus' sonship, the Father's love, and God's glory (*John 17*).

Paul uses this visual: All Christians form Christ's body with Christ as the head. This body's health requires different parts coming together in a single purpose. When one part hurts, we all hurt (*1 Corinthians 12:12-24*). When one consistently creates hurting parts, God desires we protect our unity (*Titus 3:10; Romans 16:17*).

When unity occurs, the S.O.N. flourishes. We feel peace. Joy. Love. Health improves. We build friendships. Teamwork improves. Nations create and uphold treaties.

If that isn't enough, Solomon gives basic survival benefits: recovering from a fall, maintaining a cold body's temperature, and fighting attackers. Three improve unity's strength (*Ecclesiastes 4:9-12*).

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# The Story of your Life Directed by...



■ by Kathy Krentkowski, MA, LCPC, LMHC

William Shakespeare penned the words, "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players".

I love the imagery of life being like a play. It can feel that way, can't it? Sometimes life feels like a motion picture. One day it is a comedy. Another day, it is a tragedy. However the scenes of our life are unfolding, who, I ask, is the director? Do you have one?

**I propose that your director is one of three people:**

**YOU**

**SOMEONE ELSE**

(like a parent, child or loved one)

**GOD**

The book, Alcoholics Anonymous, shares a similar concept, which likens us to players acting on a stage. It points out that we, at times, get disturbed by the performance of our fellow actors, and may, in the middle of a scene, stop, turn and re-direct them. We may help them with their "lines" or suggest a grander entrance. We may do these things with the best intention; however, in doing so we "stop the scene" and step into the role of director. And what usually happens? The other person becomes resentful, gets irritated, doesn't do what we suggest and then we become the resentful ones. And the scene is a mess! Maybe you can relate to this, or perhaps you have seen it happen.

I'll ask again, who is your director? Do you have one?

For me, this lesson became exquisitely clear when I was complaining to a friend about someone who had hurt my feelings. My friend listened quietly, and when I was done, she asked me, "Did you give them their lines?"

I was puzzled.

What did she mean, "Did I give them their lines?" Instead of explaining what she meant, she let me go on because I had yet ANOTHER story of how I had been hurt. This

time, she said, "How dare they not follow their lines!"

I was starting to pick up on the sarcasm. She began to share with me this same idea that I was trying to "direct" people. After some revelation, I started to see that I was getting bent out of shape because they were not saying or doing things the way I wanted. My hurt was valid and I needed to deal with the hurt and impact these situations had on my heart, mind, and behavior. No doubt there was an impact. But I also had to get clear that I was essentially trying to dictate how things should turn out in these relationships, and in doing so, I was stepping into a role I was not intended to have.

I do not want to be the director. I do not want that responsibility. I fear I would make a royal mess. But there is one whom I can trust with that role: God.

God is the director. I am not. My job is to be me, to the best of my ability, and allow God, my director, to help me with being me.

The same goes for you. There has never been another person in the whole world quite like you. It is no accident that you occupy the very space of the world that you fill. You are always supposed to be you.

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## Building Unity

One simple choice encourages or damages unity. We foster unity when we:

### Remember:

- Trust God for control (John 16:33).
- God created our differences. (1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Romans 12:4).
- Healthy priorities. Remind yourself: "I am not the center of the universe" (Philippians 2:3).

### Practice:

- Forgiveness. It creates internal peace and gives God glory (Proverbs 17:9; John 17:22-24).
- Good communication. Respectfully respond after listening closely. (James 1:19)

- Finding positives and dwelling there (Philippians 4:8-9).
- Accountability. We cannot control others' decisions, but we control our own (Romans 12:18).

So much more needs to be said. Please research the subject. We need internal peace, relational peace, and world peace. We need healthy relationships and healthy nations. Unity requires hard work, but the resulting life-long songs sound beautiful!

This hard work may require help. Good therapy provides a safe space for internal skirmishes to downright brawls. Good Christian therapy includes Christian thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes. ■

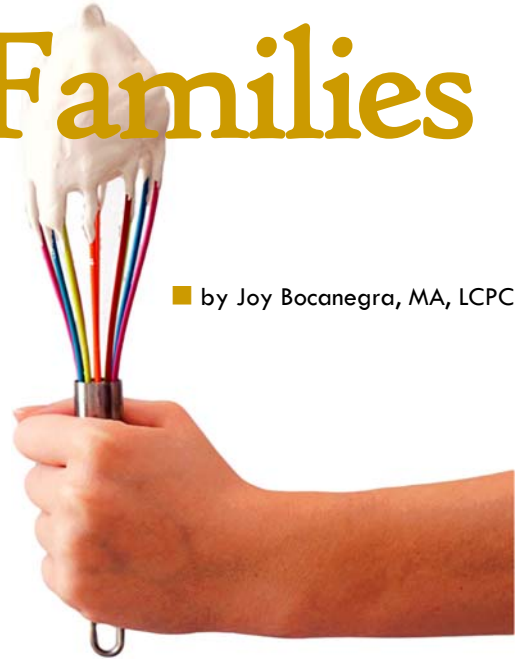
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# Marriage Tips for Blended Families

**W**hen we think about the word “blending” we think about mixing together until smooth. “Blending families” is typically anything but smooth. Why? Because when a marriage begins with children from previous relationships it begins with extra challenges. Not having time to establish a marriage before children means there are more people and things to think about from the beginning, creating complications and confusion. Let’s look at some things that can help a couple strengthen their marriage as they blend their families.



■ by Joy Bocanegra, MA, LCPC

## Realistic Expectations

Our expectations affect our attitude and our behavior. Unmet expectations lead to disappointment. Realistic expectations are an important part of beginning a marriage. Especially remarriage where there are so many people involved. Stepfamilies are formed after a loss. A death of a spouse, a divorce, or break-up has occurred. Both the adults and the children have losses and need to grieve those losses. Make sure time and space are created to grieve these losses if that has not already occurred. Expect the children to have some difficulty with the changes that will come and allow them time to talk about their feelings. Adults need to talk about feelings and concerns from previous marriages that may cause a problem. Every family has conflict and challenges. The complexity of blended families brings unique challenges. It’s realistic to expect bumps in the road but you don’t have to face those alone. God is with you. Isaiah 43:2 “When you go through the deep waters, I will be with you.”

## Living arrangements

When beginning a second marriage it is advantageous to get a home together so both partners feel it’s “our home” rather than moving into a home previously resided in by one of the partners. Children can also benefit from a new home for “our family.” Everybody needs some space of their own. Whether it’s a room, corner of a room, dresser or special chair, every child needs to know they have a space of their own. This is also true for kids who reside with the other parent part-time. Certain drawers in a dresser or a portion of a closet need to be designated for the child who resides with the other parent but comes alternative weekends or whenever arrangements have been made. Knowing they have their own space helps create a feeling of belonging.

## Pray Together

Set aside regular time to pray together for each other and your family. Seek God’s wisdom and guidance as you establish your new family and as you deal with every day stressors. As questions come - and they will - go to God in prayer. He loves you and wants to help. Philippians 4:6-7 says, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”



## Balance time

Remarried parents can feel caught in the middle between their new partner and their children. It is important to spend time with your spouse, time as a family and one-on-one time with your children.

## Couple Time

Because there are already children, there will be added demands for time and attention. It’s important for couples to have time alone where they can focus on one another. Date nights and or taking trips without the children is a way to get this time. Sharing fun and relaxation is imperative to a strong relationship. All work and no play leads to disconnection. Couples need time to affirm one another, be affectionate and share thoughts and feelings. Be intentional to schedule bi-weekly or once-a-month dates on the calendar or in your planner - otherwise they aren’t likely to happen. Prioritize and guard this time.

## Time with Family

Families need time together to connect and build relationships. Working and playing together helps achieve this. Responsibilities might be divided up to prepare a meal and clean-up afterward or work together in the yard. Family fun might include playing games, or outings to the zoo or other age-appropriate activities.

## Time alone with children

Children may feel the new spouse takes time and attention away from them. They may fear they are losing mom or dad. Feelings of jealousy and resentment are normal. Knowing they will have time alone with their biological parent can help reduce these negative feelings and can also

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## Our Mission Statement

Promoting health and wholeness through professional counseling, consultation and education from a Christian perspective.

### *Cont'd from p 2 - Story of Your Life*

God, who can be your director and mine, knows how to run the show. He has a vision that is good (Jeremiah 29:11). We see in part while God sees the whole storyboard (1 Corinthians 13:12). Choosing to let God direct our lives means we take our lead from him. If my "co-actors" (i.e., parent, child, spouse, co-worker, etc.) do not act as I see fit, I can choose to turn them over to God for him to direct. I look to God for direction. I show up and be me to the best of my ability and see what happens.

David prayed, "Show me the way I should go, for to you I entrust my life" (Psalm 143:8). We don't have to have everything figured out. The Lord loves us and will take care with our life. When we have ideas about what to say or do, we can bring them to God for his guidance and direction and then "commit to the Lord whatever (we) do and he will establish (our) plans" (Proverbs 16:3). God is faithful to stay interested in your life. He sees and knows you: you are chosen to be you. Let God have his way in your life. You: a beautiful story.

May you know God to be your director and come to see him glorified in the beautiful unfolding of your story. ■



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strengthen their relationship. Time alone with stepchildren can help stepparents connect with them and build a bond.

#### **Be patient and offer one another grace**

As you blend your family, appreciate each other's differences, be gracious in response to mistakes, communicate openly and be flexible. Ephesians 4:2 tells us to, "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." These practices can help you create a nurturing family.

So, with rolled up sleeves we continue to work at blending, smoothing out the lumps. Just like baking bread takes time—mixing ingredients, kneading the dough, time for the dough to rise, and then baking...blending families takes time—combining family members, getting to know one another, accepting differences, adjusting to change, building trust and connection. The average stepfamily takes five years to stabilize, but be encouraged! Perseverance and love can yield awesome results. Strong marriages in blended families are possible. ■



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