

# Marriage Tips for Blended Families

■ by Joy Bocanegra, MA, LCPC

When 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.

## 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.

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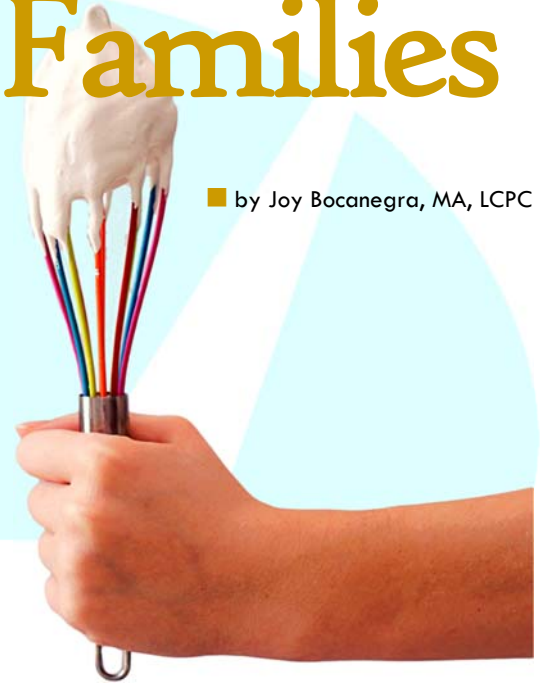
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## Couple Time

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.



normal. Knowing they will have time alone with their biological parent can help reduce these negative feelings and can also strengthen their relationship. Time alone with stepchildren can help stepparents connect with them and build a bond.

## Time with Family

Families need time together to connect and build relationships. Working and playing together helps achieve this. Responsibilities might be divvied 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

## 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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