

God's Plan for Blended Families

by Moe & Paige Becnel

If you are in a blended family (also termed "stepfamily") or related to one, you know that living in that environment can be a bumpy road in life! In fact, a close friend of ours defined his experience as a "roller coaster ride – hold on tight." The process of blending two families into one is often extremely challenging. There were times when the Becnells felt that their family would always function as a fragmented family. Some counselors told us it is not possible to blend.

When two people marry, they always hope to live happily ever after. For 1st time marriages (biological families), the divorce rate is near 50%. However, the statistics change significantly in remarriage. The divorce rate of 2nd marriages exceeds 60%, and is near 70% for 3rd time marriages.

The high divorce rate in the last several years has created a large population of hurting adults and children. It also has led to a very high number of blended families, and the number grows by 1,300 each day.

Why is the divorce rate higher in blended families? The people in a blended family often carry the hurts, unforgiveness, lack of trust, lack of full commitment, and other baggage from the prior family breakdown that hinders the new family.

Then there are issues exclusive to blended families. As we began the process of blending our new family of seven people in 1989, we were blind-sided by issues that were new to us, and our attempts to solve them with human reasoning only led to failure, hurt feelings, frustration, and disrespect. Resentment was starting to take root.

In our prayer time God began to expose negative dynamics in our family and showed us in His Word the changes that needed to take place to build our family. The first thing God confirmed was that He was on our side. He had completely forgiven us from our past failed relationships, and He wanted to restore our lives and give us and our children a loving family environment.

We also began to realize key areas where our family was divided, and areas where we were fighting each other rather than working together. Matthew 12:25 describes the shortcomings in many families today.

"Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, 'every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand.'" Matthew 12:25

Here are some symptoms of potential divisions in blended families:

- "You discipline yours and I'll discipline mine" are common statements.
- You only talk proudly of your children, while your spouse only talks proudly of his or her children.
- You have high grace toward your children, but low grace toward your spouse's children.
- Two sets of expectations, rules and/ or discipline exist in your new home.
- You and your spouse cannot come to agreement on one set of rules and discipline.
- Children call the new parent by "Mr. or Mrs. (name)."
- Your one-on-one time with children is only spent with your biological children.
- The term "step" is used in your new home (stepfather, stepmother, stepsister, stepbrother).
- You do not love your new children as your own, nor do you think you can.
- You feel like you are raising someone else's children.
- "They have other parents" is your excuse to not treat your new children with acceptance.
- You think, "My spouse's children do not want me in their life."
- You have feelings of dislike, anger, or resentment toward one of your spouse's children.
- You do not consider your spouse's grandchildren as your grandchildren.

- Child support is not used to support the intended children.
- You and your spouse have separate checkbooks.
- You and your spouse disagree about the use of child support.
- There are “favorite” children in the home.
- A former spouse is allowed to interfere with your new marriage and family.
- You or your spouse does not feel secure in your marriage relationship, or with your home environment.

Notice how many of these involve the children. Also consider the expanded family size with many new personalities, possible custody or child-support court dates, juggling children between the biological parents for visitation, the lack of intimate quiet time between spouses, and overcoming the “stepmother” syndrome.

As the Becnells began to address these divisions in our family by applying solutions in God’s Word, our family began to blend.

All families can blend, but it takes commitment, love, grace, sacrifice, a willingness to change, and time (an average of 6 years). Here are some suggestions that will give hope to blended families:

Your family will blend:

- ✓ when you start believing that it can. If you think it will not, it will not.
- ✓ when you realize that God is a good God, and is on your side. After all, He wrote “the book” on relationships (The Holy Bible).
- ✓ when you highly respect your spouse, stand up for your spouse, and “demand” that your children treat your spouse with respect. You are two working to become one. Relentlessly pursue becoming one.
- ✓ when the stepparent chooses to love the children as his or her own. When a man or woman marries a person with a child, they are marrying that child too. A biological parent their children cannot be separated, though many stepparents have tried - and fail.
- ✓ when you seek to understand the potential pain in the hearts of the children in your home, and give them your compassion and consideration,
- ✓ when you avoid using the prefix, “step-”. Using this term puts people in a lower category than their biological parent, child or sibling.
- ✓ when stepparents “friendship-date” their stepchildren. Just as you spent one-on-one time building a loving relationship with your spouse (their biological parent), begin to build a sincere loving relationship with your stepchildren by consistently spending one-on-one time with them.
- ✓ when you do not try to discipline your stepchildren until you love them as your own. (Hebrews 12:6) Trying to discipline without love will only lead to resentment and disrespect, which in turn leads to more chaos in the home.
- ✓ when you stop allowing the children’s other biological parent to control or manipulate what goes on in your home. Defend your family against outside interference.
- ✓ when you do not give up trying.

Though the statistics were not in our favor, the Becnell family truly blended into a loving family. Our family members love each other, respect each other, visit each other on vacations, and enjoy family reunions whenever we can. In fact, we find that we function more as a loving family than many biological families we know.

The Becnells believed that with God all things are possible, and as we sought His Truth and Provision to blend our family He showed up in an amazing way, healing the hearts of our family members and drawing us close together.

In the book, "God Breathes on Blended Families – 2nd Edition," we share our heart, our struggles, our failures and our successes with you. We tell you now that blending a family is not easy, and it doesn't happen quickly.

It requires sacrifice, being willing to make changes in yourself.

It requires a positive attitude. Do not expect other people's attitudes to change until yours does.

It requires relentless patience - another tough one.

It requires considering all those around you, even children, as more important than yourself.

It requires extending grace - treating others as God treats you.

It requires setting goals, strategies, boundaries, and high standards for you and your family.

It requires an "adoptive" spirit, which God will provide when you ask.

It requires faith that God will breathe on your blended family, just like He did the Becnel family. Only God can bring forth fruit from the good seeds you plant.

It requires prayer. God's breath and voice comes as we spend time communicating with Him.

Becoming a loving blended family requires much from you, Mom and Dad. You must take the lead. It is an investment into your future and your children's future, and the dividends are great!

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