

Are the Children the REAL Problem in Your Blended Family?

Part 3: Giving the “Benefit of the Doubt”

We continue with our series of articles looking at the reasons that some children have trouble adjusting to the new home environment, and things parents/ stepparents can do - or should avoid, to help their children and stepchildren want to be a part of the new family.

Questions to Think About

Has someone ever judged you wrongly because they did not have all of the facts, and did not bother to obtain all of the facts?

Have you ever been chastised or punished by your parent or supervisor based on them hearing one side of the story, and it was not your side?

Or, have you been the one who reacted too quickly and wrongly accused your spouse, child or stepchild of wrongdoing?

Have you heard gossip, and believed it, rather than giving the victim the benefit of the doubt?

Moe & Paige have been both victims and wrongful judges in our life and in our family. We hate to admit it, but we have fallen into the “emotional trap” too many times in our new marriage and family of not giving the “Benefit of the Doubt”. And each time one of these scenarios has played out in our life, it has caused hurt and has damaged relationships that we hold dear.

Why do we fail to give the Benefit of the Doubt to our family members, and other people? Here are some thoughts:

1. Our “opinion” overrides our pursuit of the facts and truth.
2. We do not love the child or stepchild, as we should. When there is lack of love, it is easy to find fault and/ or administer unjust discipline.
3. We fail to get the whole story. We conclude that the side of the story we heard is accurate.
4. A child or stepchild has previously misbehaved, so we assume he or she is guilty again.
5. Previous friction exists between us and our child or stepchild.
6. We do not consider that an accusation made by another person may well be exaggerated. We fail to realize that when there is conflict between 2 people, emotions run high, and the facts will likely get blown out of proportion.
7. We have had a bad day. We come home and find more conflict to deal with. Our patience is thin! In such an emotional state, a small problem can seem huge and we will make a quick and wrong judgement.
8. We do not consider the relationship damage incurred when we wrongly accuse someone.
9. We do not value the relationship.

The Negative Result

Here are some negative results that surface whenever we fail to give the Benefit of the Doubt:

- Trust is broken! We send a signal that we do not trust them. As a result, our spouse or children begin to not trust us.
- We lose respect in the eyes of our spouse and children.
- Our relationships grow further apart, rather than closer together. After all, who wants to be close to someone who has wrongfully accused him or her?
- Damaged relationships are not easily nor quickly restored.

Some Advice

God’s Word has much to say about such situations, and we offer you some advice that will help you properly handle these situations in your home.

1. **Realize the value of your children and stepchildren.**

Proverbs 17: 6 says, *“Sons are a heritage from the Lord , children a reward from him.”*

A) Your children are part of the next generation of adults. God gives us children to raise that they will become effective adults and the leaders of tomorrow. So think about this ---

> What kind of future adults and leaders are you raising up in your home?

> What are you teaching them about the values of love, mercy, grace, fairness, honesty, dependability, responsibility, holiness and integrity?

> Are you instilling in them that God has a detailed plan for the rest of their life?

> Are you teaching them the truth about God, or your opinions about God?

B) Our stepchildren are also a heritage from the Lord. They are NOT “extra baggage”, “someone else’s problem”, or just “along for the ride”. Regardless of a stepparent’s intention, stepparents will influence their stepchildren’s lives, either positively or negatively. Stepparents have responsibility for the development of their stepchildren.

2. Be a dispenser of grace.

Let’s understand what grace is ---

Psalm 86:15 says, *“But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.”*

God extended His grace to us by washing away our sins. We were guilty of sin, but God chose to cleanse us from our sin and remove the wages of sin from our lives. God’s perfect love looks past our faults, and sees our value and potential.

A police officer extends grace when he stops you for speeding, and just gives you a warning. You rightfully deserved the ticket and the fine, but he gave you a break.

Love is the foundation of grace.

Someone who loves you finds it easy to look past your faults, to see your potential, and to administer forgiveness and grace!

Someone who does not love you finds it easy to find your faults and administer harsh discipline!

Let grace flow from you. Look for opportunities to extend grace to those around you.

Do you find it difficult to extend grace to someone? It is a symptom that you do not love that person.

In Luke 10: 27, Jesus states, *“Love your neighbor (those people in your life) as yourself.”*

Matthew 5: 44 reads, *“But I tell you: love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you and pray for those who persecute you”.*

If God tells us to love, bless, do good and pray for our enemies, HOW MUCH MORE should we love, bless, do good and pray for our spouse, children and stepchildren.

Pray often for those who you struggle to extend grace to, and take steps to bless them. *As you pray, your love for that person will grow and you will be able to extend genuine grace.*

3. When there is conflict, get the facts, and make sure the facts are accurate.

James 1: 19-20 reads, *“My dear brothers, take note of this: everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.”*

Listen to the accused. Ask the accused why they did what they did. They may have had sound reason.

If you repeatedly assume your child/ stepchild is guilty, they will begin to perceive themselves as a bad person, and that they have no value.

4. Never make a decision or judgement when you are emotional.

An angry person will never make a sound judgement. If you are angry, defer your judgement and discipline until after you calm down.

5. Let your discipline be filled with love!

Colossians 3:21 reads, *“Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.”*

A disciplinarian seeks to administer punishment, to give the person what they deserve.

A loving parent / stepparent seeks to balance correction with grace, so they do not bruise the child's God-given spirit.

6. Apologies are mandatory!

When you are guilty of making a false judgement, admit it to the person who you wronged --- and ask for their forgiveness.

7. Go Beyond the Benefit of the Doubt --- Focus on the Good!

Proverbs 3:27 says, *“Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act.”*

Focus on the good things that your spouse, children and stepchildren do, and give them verbal praise and tangible rewards.

Give attention to giving your spouse, children and stepchildren your love, your interest, your time, your grace and the Benefit of the Doubt!!

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