



BLENDED FAMILIES (Yours, Mine, & Ours)



KEY POINTS

PROGRAM SUMMARY

This program opens with a dream sequence showing two children peacefully playing a card game with their Dad while, in another room, a **WITCH(!)** is apparently messing up everything in the house! But, thank heavens, it's just a **BAD DREAM!** The narrator comments on the old myth of the "bad stepmother," but says that most step parents struggle desperately to bring harmony to the new household.

Some problems common to the attempt to mix individuals from former family units into a new family unit are explored, and approaches that might help the **new family unit** to "jell" are offered.

MAJOR MESSAGE

When one or both individuals in a new marriage have children who will become part of a new family unit, the situation has complex problems:

(1) it's a union born of *loss* (each individual - adult or child - has lost a partner or parent), and

(2) all have already gone through an emotional roller coaster featuring the break-up of one family followed by the first steps required in building a *new* family unit of separate elements from two *former* units.

Building a new unit is a real challenge! The adults involved must be constantly sensitive to each child's hopes, fears, and needs, and be ready, willing, and able to keep communication going between and among all those in the newly-forming unit, as well as those from the former units. What a task!

There are some common pitfalls in trying to form a new family unit when one or more individuals in the new family unit comes from one of two previously-dissolved family units. Even if only one of the two persons in the new marriage has a child (or children), there are therefore **not just two, but three or more** individuals' desires and expectations to confront. The problem of having multiple needs and hopes to juggle can be overwhelming. Patience, sensitivity, and the willingness on the part of everyone (even grandparents) to talk things out calmly is essential.

A stepfamily doesn't function like an original family right away. As in **any** family, since children are always growing and developing, new problems keep appearing. A stepfamily has to expect that, in all probability, resolving these problems may involve former spouses, and, as a result, require more complex interactions and negotiations than in a "first family" situation.

Changes in the children's lifestyle represent a real pitfall. Both the parent and stepparent need to work together to analyze every child's new situation and reactions, and develop a plan to help smooth things out.

In reality, stepfamilies often tend to take a long time to become a smooth, comfortable unit; it's sometimes best if a stepparent tries to first become a "friend" to the stepchild before asserting rights as a "parent" to the child.

Children should be permitted to **grieve** the loss of the old family, old home, old friends, while adults should try to let go of feeling of loss, resentment or hostility to their former spouses.

Visiting stepchildren must be made to feel comfortable in the parent's new home and not like a "drop-in guest." Try to arrange for them to have a little corner of their own and some permanent belongings, such as "their drawer," "their part" of a closet, or a shelf of mementos.

Another problem which requires attention from stepparents is sexuality as it concerns the children or anyone in the step family but not biologically related. Stepparents must remain alert to sexual feelings that may arise as children grow up. Awareness, concern, and caution are advised.



WHILE VIEWING

Try to take special notice of one of the examples of "jealousy" on the part of a stepchild. What's the *cause*? How can such a situation be handled *best*?

REFLECTIONS

For five minutes or so, think over the many problems that could occur in a blended family. If you were asked to provide some words of caution concerning possible problems that might arise in a friend's second marriage, what would you say?

In your opinion, is it important to consider and discuss these probable problems (and potential solutions) before persons with children re-marry?