



WHAT IS A “BLENDED FAMILY”?

For children, a “blended family” usually means living with one parent, and that parent’s partner, plus children of the new “step” parent. Sometimes children can have two or more blended families.

While it sounds like “THE BRADY BUNCH” the real picture can sometimes be very different, and difficult for all concerned. All parents need help at some time and parents in blended families are no different. Parents can find it helpful to talk with others in similar situations. Before we look at some of the problems children might face, let’s look at some **GOOD** things in **BLENDED FAMILIES**:

- ❖ Parents may be happier
- ❖ There are more people to care about
- ❖ There are more people to talk to and to listen!
- ❖ Jobs can be shared with more people
- ❖ Life can be more interesting
- ❖ Children could have brothers and/or sisters for the first time
- ❖ If children are allowed time to adjust to their new family life they may learn more about themselves, be more mature and better organised

Remember, children who do have problems in blended families should not be blamed or made to feel responsible for these

problems. With loving care-and time! – problems can be resolved to everyone’s satisfaction.

SOME PROBLEMS FOR CHILDREN COULD BE:

- ❖ Moving to a new house or school;
- ❖ Having newcomers in the family home;
- ❖ Having to share living space with people who are not well known to the child;
- ❖ Being discipline by a “new” parent;
- ❖ Missing out on parental attention, and feeling left out;
- ❖ Missing the absent parent;
- ❖ Not understanding the parent’s new relationship;
- ❖ Feeling angry or sad and not comfortable enough to talk about it;
- ❖ Not knowing how much to disclose to the absent parent;
- ❖ Different rules, values and life styles in different families;
- ❖ Finding it hard to settle in after visiting the other parent, who may be part of another *blended* family;
- ❖ Logistical problems moving between two homes, eg. accidentally leaving favourite toys/clothes at the “other” house!
- ❖ Not knowing how to build the absent parent into their lives.

Effects on Children

Some children find it difficult to adopt to the new situation and may sometimes:

- ❖ Have problems knowing where they fit in;
- ❖ Have sleeping problems;
- ❖ Have trouble with schoolwork;
- ❖ Lose interest in sports and hobbies;
- ❖ Become withdrawn
- ❖ Have temper tantrums;
- ❖ Lose appetite or overeat;
- ❖ Have lots of attention seeking behaviour.

Some Hints for HELPING

- ❖ Encourage the children to talk about any worries they may have.
- ❖ Never tell children they're "just being silly." To them their problems are real. (They will often want things to be as they were before, and their wishes are understandable, even if not realistic;)
- ❖ Avoid "pushing" children to like their "new" brothers and/or sisters, or "new" parents.
- ❖ Help by having round the table discussions
- ❖ Have meals together when you can
- ❖ Make sure all the children of appropriate age have jobs to do, and rotate the responsibilities so on one

child seems to be getting the "worst" jobs

- ❖ Encourage group games, eg. cards, monopoly, scrabble, and minimise television viewing. This can avoid fights over who wants to watch what.
- ❖ It is important, though, to make sure your child knows he or she is loved by **ALL** parents
- ❖ Work out with the children themselves, what they want to call the adults in extended families
- ❖ Be trustworthy yourself and develop some predictable routines which children can rely on
- ❖ Find ways to have fun time with each of the children on their own and for your partner to do that too
- ❖ Make time for your adult relationships

NEW BABIES:

If a new baby arrives, encourage the children to be interested in his/her growth and development.

DON'T FORGET -

All children need to know they are loved, and all children need to feel secure.

Where to Get HELP

"COMMUNITY HELP REFERENCE"

Kids Helpline: 1800 551 800