

First Year Survival Guide



Marriage

A healthy marriage is the best thing you can give your kids.

- ◆ The success of your blended family will rise and fall on your couple relationship. Nurture it daily.
- ◆ Be intentional to establish “couple time” during your daily, weekly, and monthly routines (e.g., weekly coffee dates and bi-monthly evenings out without kids).
- ◆ On issues with children keep a united front as a couple.
- ◆ When marrying into a family with a deceased biological parent, light a candle at the wedding in honor of the missing parent as a way to express love and respect to the children.
- ◆ Ask your spouse when the significant dates were with their late spouse; allow them to grieve, especially on anniversaries, birthdays or other important dates.
- ◆ Attend a blended family training event.
- ◆ Seek out a couple a few years ahead to mentor you.
- ◆ Pray a lot individually and together as a couple!
- ◆ Beware of relationship barriers—like spending too much time talking about kids or former spouses and not enough time talking about your love and partnership.
- ◆ Make a monthly commitment to evaluate your relationship. Discuss lessons learned. Identify things you may need to change or stop. Affirm your commitment to one another. Recognize that stepcouple relationships can be shaky early on.
- ◆ Develop and maintain a healthy support network that can pray with you and provide guidance, encouragement, and accountability.
- ◆ Remember, in stepfamilies, the honeymoon comes at the end of the journey, not at the beginning.



- ◇ Be aware of misbeliefs like instant love or instant family. Stepfamilies can be a place of love, respect, and nurturing, but it takes time. Soften your expectations and disappointment if the family isn't what you thought it would be right away.
- ◇ Identify the Love Language of each person in your home. A biological parent can speak the primary language of children, but stepparents should progress in the following order despite the primary language of children: Acts of Service, Gifts, Words of Affirmation, Quality Time, and Physical Touch.
- ◇ If you can't purchase a new house for your new family, purchase a new piece of furniture, perhaps a dining room table, that symbolizes your new family. As for common spaces, make minimal changes to decor and furniture the first year.
- ◇ Make room for expressions of grief; it's part of the blending process. For example, children will miss a deceased or divorced parent. Consider creative ways to honor them as new traditions are being created (especially at Christmas, graduations, weddings, and the birth of grandchildren).
- ◇ Make changes slowly and allow everyone the time they need to accept new roles, new relationships (new stepparents, new stepsiblings), new rules, new routines, possibly new schools, etc. Fast and furious creates relationship barriers.
- ◇ As you move through the first year, discuss both family's traditions and rituals for holidays and special days (e.g., birthdays). Determine how you can celebrate the old and start a new tradition or two. Shared memories will knit your family together over time.
- ◇ Create a regular family meeting to check in with everyone (especially older teens). When you can, allow kids to have a voice in the family calendar and decisions. Set guidelines for respect and appropriate boundaries with each member of the family.

***Shared memories will knit
your family together.***





Children

- ◇ Recognize that your wedding is a major transition for your children (they didn't ask for it or any of the changes they're experiencing). Kids need as much time or more adjusting to a parent's marriage as they do adjusting to a parental divorce. Be compassionate with your children's emotional swings and pay attention to how they're adjusting. If a child is struggling, stressed, or not adapting well, don't hesitate to obtain counseling.
- ◇ Biological parents should be intentional to spend one-on-one time with their kids. Move toward them so you can move toward your spouse ... and help your kids move toward your spouse.
- ◇ Consider a way to incorporate a photo of the other biological parent or deceased parent into the household in a way that honors both them and the new stepparent.

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Parenting & Stepparenting

- ◇ Be flexible and adaptable. The ability to flex through parenting changes and decision making is a critical survival skill.
- ◇ Discuss and define what it means for the biological parent to be “primary” and the stepparent “secondary” when it comes to saying “No” to children and enforcing punishment.
- ◇ Discuss how the stepparent will enforce household rules when the biological parent is away.
- ◇ Trust that the stepparent has good intentions toward your kids.
- ◇ Compliment your husband/wife in how they parent their kids.
- ◇ Try to give full-time and part-time kids their own space (room) in your home.
- ◇ Identify your parenting style (authoritative, neglectful, permissive, or authoritarian). Discuss how you might merge any differences in style.
- ◇ When children go to the other home, stepparents must recognize that their spouse cannot control what happens there. Discuss the influence of the other home, decide how you will parent together, and stay unified in your home.
- ◇ If you were raised in a nuclear family, do all you can to learn about stepfamily development. Never be afraid or embarrassed about seeking help. Join a stepfamily life group or Bible study. If there isn't one near you, start one.
- ◇ Stepparenting may be the hardest thing you ever do. Don't expect stepchildren to offer instant love or acceptance. In some cases, it can take stepchildren many years before they acknowledge and appreciate you. Focus on pleasing God instead of getting positive affirmation from your stepchild.

“And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.”

Galatians 6:9

- ◇ Ask the stepchildren what they feel comfortable calling everyone (e.g., son or stepson, daughter or stepdaughter, stepmom or first name, stepdad or first name). Express that it is okay to change titles as time passes. Allow kids to ebb and flow between labels/titles.
- ◇ Be careful how you post on social media; less is more. Always think of how each comment/photo will impact the kids and extended family.
- ◇ Avoid unintentional landmines on Mother's Day or Father's Day by showing respect or honor to a former partner or deceased parent.




Co-Parenting

- ◇ Because your marriage can disrupt daily calendars and previous co-parenting routines, work hard to keep visitation schedules, reaffirming to the parent(s) in the other home that you are committed to a collaborative co-parenting process.
- ◇ A new stepparent might communicate to the biological parent in the other home that you know your place (e.g., not replacing them, just another “adult caregiver”) and will support their relationship with their children. Each parent or stepparent should give each child permission to like or love everyone in both of their homes.
- ◇ Do your part to stay in harmony with the other home.

“If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”

Romans 12:18

- ◇ Work hard to respect the other parent (household); do not invade their time/space or demean their living circumstances.
- ◇ Never ask your children to be spies or tattletales on the other home.
- ◇ Sometimes a wedding resurrects old relationship hurt/pain. Offer or seek forgiveness to prevent these hurts from spoiling your cooperation.



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Co-Parenting

- ❖ Don't put off tough conversations. Be sure to update your wills or living trust and revisit your insurance policies and accounts (e.g., are there any changes to be made to policies or beneficiaries?).
- ❖ Discuss how you will steward your assets and pay down debt.
- ❖ Discuss what college funding or trade school funding looks like. Discuss with a financial expert how you will provide for each child.
- ❖ Discuss what retirement looks like. Meet with a financial expert(s) and discuss the when, where, and how for both of your Social Security timeframes, your corporate retirement plans, IRA's, businesses, farming operations, future inheritances, both your current and projected future assets and income, etc.
- ❖ Discuss what leaving a Legacy (or "Inheritance") looks like. Come to an agreement on when and how to communicate these plans with all parties involved.



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