

# Let's Talk: Blended families

***Presenter – Jennifer Swayne, Clinical Counselor***

Hi, my name is Jennifer and I wanna chat with you today about some tips to make blended families work. With 50% of families in the U.S. being remarried or re-coupled, this is such an important topic. With blended families being so common, I wanna share a few tips that will hopefully make the transition easier for everyone; your spouse or partner and the kids. I can tell you firsthand what worked for me and my blended family, but everyone is different. Find what works for you and your family.

## **Tip #1: Acknowledge it will take work**

So tip number one: Roll up your sleeves and acknowledge it's gonna take some work. So throw away your idea of The Brady Bunch. While that may be the case for some, it's not for most of us. I have two girls and my husband has a son. Everyone is so close in age that I thought it would be so easy to combine families. Boy, was I wrong. It takes a lot of patience, commitment and a whole lot of love. Sometimes, just shifting your mindset beforehand can help. Just that acknowledgment of the work ahead can help normalize the times that you hit those road bumps, which you will. Our biggest road bump was how we handled parenting. So make that list of what you see as an obstacle before it comes up. Which takes me to my tip number two.

## **Tip #2: Plan ahead**

Tip number two: Plan ahead. As best as you can, plan how you will tackle things as they come up. Some couples say that talking to a counselor before the union or move is extremely helpful. Plan how you may handle conflicts, bedtimes, homework, holidays and so on. No topic is too trivial. Each person comes to the relationship with different parenting styles. They probably have gotten used to those as a single parent.

## **Tip #3: Give time and space**

My third tip is to give everyone time and space. Patience and empathy can go a really long way. Put yourself in the kids' shoes. Sometimes it takes more time for relationships to flourish. It can take more time for some kids than others, especially if they have a sense of guilt for liking another parental figure. For my family, it took my older daughter a lot longer to actually like her step-father. This is totally normal. Try doing special things with the children and as hard as it might be, try to

treat them all equally. Step-parents really do have a big role. Make sure to spend time with your step-children individually which leads me to my next tip around the parenting roles.

### **Tip #4: Agree on roles in advance**

Tip number four: Agree on roles ahead of time. A family counselor told me that a good rule of thumb for step-parents is to do only 25% or less of the actual parenting initially. It's important to not rush into a parental role. This is what that prep work and planning can be really helpful. It has been three years for us, and we are still working on this one.

### **Tip #5: Get help**

Last, and to me, most importantly, is to get help. This could be from a licensed professional or even a book or website. Here are some websites and books that I personally found helpful: [Stepfamily.org](http://Stepfamily.org), [Stepfamilies.info](http://Stepfamilies.info) and "The Smart Stepfamily," "The Smart Stepmom" and "The Smart Stepdad," all by Ron Deal were helpful to me and my family.

### **Start your own traditions**

Blended families can be a beautiful thing so make sure to start your own traditions as a new family. Appreciate differences and work together as a team.

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