

BLENDED FAMILIES AND DISCIPLINE

Step or blended families are more common in today's time than in any previous time. Often, families who are blended have come from very diverse and difficult backgrounds. Successful blended families demonstrate positive communication through frequent family meetings, consistently agreeing on and enforcing rules. These are parents who operate as a team which avoids opportunities for manipulation. Children in blended families need to be able to express feelings and negotiate difficult choices and decisions. Many families have an ability to share common interests and focus. Open, honest, direct communication between parents leads to the same behaviors for their children. Parents need to recognize different points of view or methods of living and determine how their differences can best be coordinated.

Important in any family is making the rules clear and applying them consistently. Following through on consequences is what makes discipline work. Applying rules equally and fairly is especially important in blended families. In blended families, the children come with different experiences and expectations concerning rules and consequences. After the parents have decided what they are planning, this should be presented to all the children. Rules and consequences need to be applied fairly to children that visit evenings, weekends and for vacations. Visiting children should have reasonable expectations for chores as well, in keeping with their time spent in the home.

Discipline problems can arise when the custodial parents, children, and noncustodial parents disagree. As problems arise they should be dealt with honestly and directly. Often stepparents have trouble negotiating among themselves to find an agreeable compromise. Additional time may need to be set aside to continue to resolve controversial issues. All children test their parent's efforts to discipline and this can happen more often with stepchildren. Parents need to expect that it will take time for all the children to adjust to the changes in rules and consequences.

Parents should not give up on their plans just because there is some initial resistance. Some adjustments may need to be made as family members get to know each other. Efforts made to include noncustodial parents can go a long way to help solve, as well as prevent, behavioral problems in children. The parenting team can include noncustodial parents from the beginning. If this is not possible, the blended family needs to go ahead with their plan independently.

Remember the most important rules for parents:

- Consistency
- Fairness
- Age appropriate rules and consequences
- Follow through
- Communicate in a positive manner

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