

Remarriage: Avoid the blended family breakdown

Before you say your vows for the second time, get expert tips for blending your families

By: Deborah Moskovitch



Do you remember *The Brady Bunch*? Mike Brady marries Carol Martin; they each bring into this second marriage three children (three boys, three girls), and this blended family of eight live happily ever after. And don't forget Alice, the live-in housekeeper, keeping it all together and running smoothly. Little conflict, lots of love, and always fun.

But alas, that was the early 70s. It was a time of love, light and humanity. Four decades later, people still yearn for love, but we've become a fast food culture where decisions are made at lightening speed, and consequences are an afterthought.

Case in point: my friend Annie. [Divorced](#) for seven years and raising two children on her own, she was at a New Year's dinner party when she met Gary, who had been divorced for three years with two children. Eleven months later, after an incredible whirlwind relationship, they were in the judges' chambers exchanging wedding vows. Within 30 minutes a new family unit was formed. Sounds wonderful, but the *Brady Bunch* union it was not.

When Annie and Gary pledged to be together forever, a new family dynamic was thrust upon their children. The children now became step-siblings, barely knew each other, and were used to different households.

This was not one big happy family; there was conflict, chaos and frustration. The children did not get along well, were used to different sets of house rules, study habits, and different monthly allowances.

Blending families: How to avoid disaster

Sandy Shuler, a social worker and certified Canadian family educator in Calgary (<http://www.familylifeworks.ca>), advises clients that when blending a family, the first thing they should do is not to have preconceived ideas and unrealistic expectations about what the family is going to look like.

"Every family is unique in terms of the way it looks and the way it operates. Expecting that there is going to be an instant connection and bonding situation when there are children involved can lead to disappointment and challenges," Shuler says. "Just because the adults are thrilled about the idea of merging does not mean that the children are, so the adults need to go into the situation realistically with their eyes wide open."

Shuler advises couples act proactively, and tackle issues before blending the family: "Prior to blending, go to a counselor and finding out what the likely hot spots are going to be." (If money might be a hot spot - and it probably will be - here's what to consider about blended family finances.)

New family relationships require time to form, making patience key. "It can take up to seven years for this new family to gel and bond, especially if the children are older," Shuler says. Time, commitment and patience are required of all family members if the new family unit is to succeed; Shuler says, "For some families, the best outcome is simply a cooperative co-existence."

Blending families? Smooth the process with these expert tips.

Tips for successfully blending families

Help kids adapt to the new family configuration Children will belong to two households/families; they need guidance to adjust to different set of rules, expectations, and systems.

Bonding takes time Don't expect children to love and adore each other or your new partner right away. In some cases, the best case scenario would be working towards courtesy and respect. Building caring relationships between children and their new step-parent/family is a process that requires time and patience.

Be open to discussion Creating opportunities for family discussions, problem-solving and negotiation helps children manage.

Prepare the family for a change Establishing new family patterns, rituals and traditions help children feel a sense of belonging and shared memories.

Understand the new relationship Clarifying roles, responsibilities and expectations in the blended family serves as a "road map" with strategies for building relationships and a solid framework for the family unit.

Develop a conflict resolution strategy Conflict is a part of all families. Combined families have more complex and diverse needs and emotions in dealing with conflict; a solid conflict resolution model helps to address these issues.

Demonstrate your love Children need reassurance that they are loved and are still a priority to their biological parent, as loyalty issues can arise.

Discipline your own, and step back for his children The general rule of thumb about discipline is that the biological parent is the one who guides the discipline for their own children when there are step-children living together. But within one household the rules need to be consistently applied for all children who live there—and there should not be two sets of rules.

Given that a high proportion of marriages end in divorce, a large number of people in their middle years again become available for [marriage](#). It's a no wonder that almost half of Canadian families are "blended" and more than 81% of these families have children from the current union.

But the bottom line is what ever you call it—a step family, blended family, combined family—it's a newly reconfigured family unit. It takes time to bring this new family together, and it takes effort—just remember to resolve conflict, demonstrate love and find the fun.

From the *More* archives: [Blended family finances](#). Still looking for Mr. Right? Tips for [dating after divorce](#) and [everything you wanted to know about midlife dating](#).

Deborah Moskovitch is a divorce consultant and educator, and author of The Smart Divorce: Proven Strategies and Valuable Advice from 100 Top Divorce Lawyers, Financial Advisers, Counselors and Other Experts. Deborah has become an opinion leader in the media and has shared her

insights and research on television and radio to explain that divorce can be managed in smarter ways. To learn more visit thesmartdivorce.com

This article is original content on More.ca