



Employee NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program
May 2018

Introducing the New Normal: Helping Children Adjust to Blended Families

It all looked so simple on *The Brady Bunch*: two families come together and the transition is seamless. Everyone is happy; no one fights. Unfortunately, as many parents who have remarried find out, bringing two sets of families under one roof often presents many unexpected difficulties.

If this has been your experience, it's good to know that you're not alone. Most merged families experience a resistance from its younger family members, especially as the children deal with fear, grief, acceptance, and even excitement. If you're contemplating blending your family with your partner's, or even if you're still dealing with the effects of a recent family merger, consider some of the following thoughts and tips for helping your partner and your children cope with this enormous change:

Clearly Define the Roles of Each New Stepparent

It's wise to first agree on these roles with your partner, and then to introduce these roles to the children. Knowing roles and structure actually provides comfort to children, since the certainty offers a kind of safety.

Take Your Time With New Children

Take your time when building relationships. While you may be confident in your abilities as a parent, you are still an unknown factor to your partner's children. Pay attention to what their body language is telling you, and be open to asking questions about what they'd like. Children are generally good at letting you know when they're ready to be closer.

Don't Ignore Biological Families

It's very likely that some in your new blended family will have two parents now. Try to clarify that you are not a replacement for their parents, but now they have an addition to their family. If you can, make it clear that there are just more people to love them in their life now!

Look For the Root Cause of Acting Out

It's a well-known fact that children will act out when upset or going through change, and as their caregiver you are in the right position to get them to talk about what they're feeling beneath the tantrums or the withdrawals. Do your best to foster open communication – ask questions, and offer up your own thoughts and experiences. Taking the time to show compassion and understanding will give you a chance to grow closer with them.

Educate Yourself

It should come as no surprise that your library or bookstore will have many books on the topic of divorce and blended families. Seek out information on the topic, and share what you learn with your children when you think it would be useful. It may also help to find some books for them to read as well.

Call Your EAP

If you have ongoing problems with your new family, consider calling your Employee Assistance Program for a counseling appointment. The EAP can help arrange counseling for your children individually or a family session with a professional who can provide coping strategies, support, and reassurance.

It's hard to overstate the importance of the family unit to a child. Given that the merging of families is one of the most major events your children may experience, be sure to give some extra thought to how you can best support them in this time. The extra attention may not turn your family into the *Brady Bunch*, but it may help spread a little bit more peace and love.

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