

Blended Families - Making it Work

LIFE TALK NEWS 28



What's your game plan for your Tug-of-Parenting?

Empowering youth to make life-enriching choices; equipping parents for proactive parenting; Inspiring families to thrive...

Blended Families - Making it Work

With divorce rates so high, second (blended) families are becoming the new norm. Successfully blending two families is no simple task and the complexities shouldn't be underestimated. There is much to consider, requiring plenty of thought and discussion within the family.

The Challenges

Statistics worldwide show that around 50% of first marriages fail, and 75% of second marriages, with very few second marriages surviving the first 5 years. Parenting within blended families is complex, with issues like authority, affection, role ambiguity, and a range of other challenges manifesting. Parents often face animosity from their step-children. Feelings of resentment, children feeling they need to compete for their parent's attention – all potentially causing conflict between the children and the adults. Many of these marriages fail because these important discussions are not had up-front, where decisions can be made to help drive the day-to-day running of a blended home.

This 'blending' process entails massive changes – maybe a new home in a new neighbourhood with new schools; in the daily home-life routine; there are now others to consider or consult; the stress of adapting; less time with your parent...; the list goes on. Everyone will need time to adjust.

So Consider the Following

No two blended families are the same. Each is shaped by unique shared experiences and the level of involvement by family members. Based on the situations we see in the Life Talk Forum, the following points are key:

- **Conversations:** Conversations need to take place – within your existing family, with your new spouse, and with your spouse's children. Address uncertainty, fear and other negative emotions by talking about them, preferably before the marriage even takes place. Ongoing, open and honest discussions throughout are essential.
- **Listen:** The children need to feel heard so allow them opportunities to talk and express themselves. Listen with empathy and try not to discount what they are feeling. Perspective through the eyes of a child will always be different, but to them, it is very real and unsettling. Children who feel heard will feel safer.
- **Your relationship:** Remember this is the core reason the family came together in the first place so focussing on your relationship is critical. Try to do things together as a couple and have some alone time.
- **Parenting Approach:** With your new spouse, discuss discipline, decision-making, your individual parenting styles, how to share special occasions, boundaries – all the potential hot topics which can lead to arguments and unhappiness. Create a new way of doing things within your new family.
- **Discipline:** Experts agree, the step-parent should never be the primary disciplinarian – especially initially. It should be the biological parent, but with consistent, fair support from the new spouse. This is a tough one! But, failing to consider this approach could result in resentment building between the parent and step-child, leading to endless rounds of conflict. What often happens is that the biological parent starts overcompensating to make up/cover up for the 'harsh' step-parent, resulting in further negativity, now amongst the parents. By supporting the biological parent in disciplining, the relationship with the step-child will form faster.
- **One-on-one time:** Each child needs to feel valued and important. It's easy for them to "get lost" within the new family dynamics, so one-on-one time or a special activity with each of your children and step-children will go a long way to make them feel special and secure. Support individual relationships with each child.
- **Family meetings:** Consider Life Talk's "Table Tuesday" initiative. It entails picking a day when everyone is home together, for a meal around the dinner-table, away from interruptions. Making this a date for your new family creates both an opportunity to bond, and to express opinions and talk about things. Creating new unique family traditions is also useful.
- **Be fair:** Especially towards your step-children and take an interest in them. It might be tricky at first, but once you get to know and understand them better, it will have a positive impact on your relationship.
- **Accept each other.** Look for the good in each person and don't focus on the not-so-good parts.

There are also some Don'ts

Some lessons learnt by others:

- Don't push relationships – let them develop naturally. They will be more authentic, laying solid long-term foundations.
- Don't resent one-on-one time or compete for attention. Individual family members feeling happy, safe and secure should be a priority.
- Don't under or over-discipline, and be consistent in your disciplining.
- Don't lose your temper – or at least try not to! It won't help the situation and could foster negativity and resentment.
- Try to act lovingly towards your step-child. In time these feelings may well become genuine.
- Don't underestimate the impact of divorce and blended families. All the children we've spoken to emphasise how hard the process has been for them. Younger children tend to adapt and adjust better to the new blended family, but if you have teens in the home be aware that this may be a very difficult transition for them, and they will probably need professional help to cope. In fact, some experts say that children from blended homes are three times more likely to need counselling or other professional care, and from reports to our Forum they are far more likely to turn to risky behaviour. Alcohol, drugs, low self-esteem, depression and bullying are more likely to become issues for teens who have recently gone through a family breakup or a new blended family. Whilst most parents eventually settle happily into their new family units, children often take years (sometimes decades) to feel a sense of belonging and peace.

It's important to remember that finding the right balance takes time, love and patience. Finding happiness a second time around is very possible - with the right ingredients and a good dose of effort and perseverance there is no reason why your blended family can't be a wonderful success!

Additional resources:

- <http://www.worldvillage.com>
- <http://drphil.com>

Life Talk and Tug-of-Life book special!

Our invaluable range of Life Talk books is suitable for the whole family. They provide a 'tool-kit' of essential tips on many of the current issues facing teens, young adults and parents.

The Life Talk series comprises *Life Talk for a Daughter*, *Life Talk for a Son* (for ages 12 – 20+) and *Life Talk for Parents* (for parents of children of all ages).

The Tug-of-Life provides a unique and fun approach to tackling life's dilemmas and challenges. It empowers teens and adults alike to make the best choices, and it helps them to achieve their desired outcomes and to take control of their lives. Used by schools, youth groups, churches and corporates, its simple methodology is life-changing and a "must have" for everyone.

Not only do the books make great gifts, but book sales help fund the essential work that we do. So, please support us by buying your copy today!

R200 a book - or buy all 4 books for R680 and save R120!

Courier costs excluded.

Buy online on www.tugoflife.com or email orders@tugoflife.com.

Proactive Parenting Workshops

Invest in your family and in your parenting skills. Life Talk offers a range of life-changing workshops:

WORKSHOP: Your Parenting Journey – Start with the End in Mind

Equip your child with essential life skills and tools to successfully navigate the teen years. This workshop will provide you with:

- **Invaluable insight** into your unique parenting journey
- Opportunity to create a **'vivid vision'** for your family
- **Life-changing parenting tools** that can be applied immediately
- A **unique approach** to tackling day-to-day parenting issues
- Information on (and ways to) address the "must-know" challenges that most children will face
- Expert advice on self-esteem, discipline versus punishment, communication, taking responsibility, dealing empathetically with feelings, the role of identifying your values, maximizing opportunities to experience happiness and success.

WORKSHOP: Building Children's Self Esteem

Self-esteem is the greatest gift parents can give their children. It forms the basis of a positive attitude, instils feelings of self-worth and equips them to cope with challenges that may arise.

This programme covers:

- How to articulate feelings effectively
- Practical ideas to **develop inherent strengths** in your child
- The difference between praise and encouragement
- How to handle daily discipline problems
- How to **build resilience** in order to withstand bullying and peer pressure
- The role of **developing positive self-talk & self-appreciation**
- **Listening** as an opportunity to connect.

Are you an Employer?

Consider these workshops for your Parenting Education in the Workplace. Why?

Parents who are well informed and equipped with modern-day parenting skills are not only more effective parents but they are less stressed in terms of home life issues - and therefore more productive at work. Benefits include:

- Greater employee productivity
- Reduces parental stress
- Stronger and more stable families
- Reduced problems in child health, mental health and learning difficulties
- The Tug-of-Life workshop enhances employee wellness (for staff of all ages), helps staff to make the best choices in all aspects of their life and work, and makes a huge difference to attendees' lives.

If your company or school is looking for interesting staff-development talks then consider Life Talk's wide range to choose from. For more information contact Nicoleen@lifetalk.co.za.

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