

Small Group Study

Healthy Step Families

From the sermon series, "Family Matters"



INTRODUCTION

(adapted from an article by Dr. Bill M. Loader Ph.D – Licensed Clinical Christian Counselor)

"Step families" is a relatively new term in history, but it (or "blended families") has become part of every-day language in the last 50 years. In a sense, the step family has become synonymous with a wicked step-parent or step-sibling of the "dysfunctional family" in our culture. On one extreme, we had the evil fairy tale of Cinderella with a wicked stepmother and ugly stepsisters. On the other end of the spectrum, we have the "everyone lived happily ever after" fictional family -- The Brady Bunch. And somewhere in-between is reality.

Many of the keys to healthy relationships come from simple common sense. Treat each other with kindness, patience and respect -- the way you like to be treated. Refrain from speaking ill of the other natural parent at all cost. When two separate families come together under one roof, there are going to be conflicts. However, talking about them and understanding the other's feelings is necessary and critical. It will take time to build a history with each other that will someday grow from affection into familial love. It may take time and probably won't be easy, but it is well worth the effort.

The first and foremost rule for step families is that parents DO NOT disagree with each other in front of the children. When spouses have a conflict -- any conflict -- it should be discussed behind closed doors. It is very tempting to stand up for your own child and point a finger at the stepchild. It is equally tempting to accuse your spouse of unbalanced discipline toward your child. Do not allow yourself to be guilty of the same. Remember, the children are thrown together with near strangers and suddenly feel they have to vie for their parent's attention. They can often feel like they are being replaced rather than added to.

Icebreakers

Use the questions below to help people open up and to focus your meeting. It is very helpful to go around in a circle with the leader going first. (Remember if you have new members or guests you should take time to introduce everyone.)



1. What is one of the most encouraging things anyone ever said to you?
2. Who is the humblest person you know? What makes them so humble?
3. What is your favorite sitcom from the 1970's?

It is so important for children to see a united front and stable relationships for a change. The most common problem is discipline which can quickly disrupt this unity. Early on, the natural parent needs to talk to their children and reaffirm the control and respect due the step-parent. Back up your spouse! Whether children lost a parent due to death or divorce, their lives have changed.

Additionally, the children need quality time with their natural parent. If you are the step-parent, be understanding about this. Mom, go to your son's ball game while Dad takes his daughter to the movies. This gives the children time to know they are still important and that the step-parent is not trying to come between them and their natural parent. It is also important to combine the group for a family outing -- as a whole family. And parents... don't forget to make time for the two of you without the kids! Plan a "date night" for just the two of you once a week. After all, newlyweds need time alone too.

New personalities, customs, and memories are all added to the new household of blended families. However, it is still basic that a child is the child and an adult is still the adult. Children need a balance of love and discipline. Give your stepchildren their 'much needed' affection, as you do your own children. (The loving feelings will grow in time as you do this.) It is the role of every parent (step or natural) to obey your responsibility of properly raising children. And children have a responsibility to honor their parents (Ephesians 6:2).

Young children do not have the maturity to understand the dynamics of this new family and how loving it could be; but as adults we should. Much like when couples adopt a child, we chose to marry into a family with these children. Care for them, nurture them, and accept them even when they seem to push away. Pray a lot for them and with them.

The following Bible verses can be of help during the times when raising a step family seems like an insurmountable task. Remember that a house divided cannot stand.

Isaiah 66:13: *"I will comfort as a child is comforted by its mother."*

Ephesians 4:2 *"Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowances for each other's faults because of your love."*

Ephesians 4:29, 31-32: *"Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of malicious behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgive one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you."*

QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the biggest struggles that face new step families?
2. What solutions stood out to you in Fred's sermon this weekend (and in the Introduction above)?
3. In his sermon, Fred said "forgiveness does not always end in reconciliation." What does he mean by that? What are the implications of that statement?
4. Have you ever seen children used as tools by one parent to "get back" at the other? Why is that wrong? What could happen long-term if this ends up being the case?
5. What are some ways we can apply the scriptures above to other areas in our lives?
6. Do you think it is even possible for "everything you say to be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them?" What would it take for that to happen? What kind of self-discipline would be involved?

God bless,
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