

TIPS FOR BLENDED/STEP FAMILIES

One of every three Americans is now a member of a blended/step family. Blended/step families come in a wide variety of combinations, sizes and shapes. Either one or both of the spouses have had previous marriages. Either one or both of the spouses have children and possibly stepchildren from previous marriages/relationships. What blended/step families have in common is hope and faith in the future.

Blending a family can take from four to seven years. New traditions must be established. The new marital unit needs time to create an alliance with each other and create rules about the house and parenting. New relationships among the children and between them and the new parent must be created and encouraged. Change is the order of the day and patience is the top priority.

The potential for hurt, resistance, misunderstanding and conflict is enormous. The rewards for working through the difficulties and challenges, however, can be even greater. Increased personal growth, exposure to new ideas and new people to love are some of the benefits that come from being in a blended/step family. If you find yourself stuck, remember there is a lot of help out there for you either through counseling or support groups.

TIPS FOR BLENDED/STEP FAMILY MEMBERS

- Respect every member's feelings and concerns.
- Take time for discussion, and then for more discussion.
- Clearly define rules and roles for all members.
- Let the stepparent start off as a friend, rather than as a disciplinarian.
- Be realistic about your expectations for everyone.
- Take time to have fun and engage in self-care activities.

Tuck T. Saul, Ph.D.
Suzanne C. Saul, Ph.D.
Psychologists