

Relationship Rehab Show

Episode #35: Stepfamily Strategies for Success

The word is out...there are more step-couples in our country than first marriages.

And yet, most couples entering a second or subsequent marriage with children are woefully unprepared for how different it is than their expectations. Here are a few expectations that create almost instant discouragement and disillusionment shortly after the wedding:

1. I made a mistake with my first marriage. Now we're going to do it right. (Right means I'll finally be happy and my children will have a more stable home life.)
2. My children will be happy because I will be happier.
3. The children will quickly adjust.
4. I'll have help parenting my children.
5. Life will be calmer because the bad guy (the Ex) will be out of our lives.

Reality:

1. Whatever lessons you needed to learn from your first marriage will be even more necessary in this marriage.
2. Children are happiest when their birth mom and dad love each other and provide a stable environment in which they can grow up. There are very few exceptions to this research validated truth.
3. Children may accommodate themselves to the new facts of their lives, but they rarely really adjust. They usually carry the wounds and limiting beliefs with them into adult relationships. They may be determined to NOT make the mistakes you made, but most lack confidence in their ability to create a loving, lasting marriage for themselves. The pattern of divorce as the solution to an unhappy marriage is frequently repeated.
4. Differences about parenting are the most highly reported reasons for step-family failure. If you find yourselves criticizing each other's parenting and each other's children, the recommended solution is that you each go back to being single parents or co-parenting with your EX if possible. Watch episodes 16 and 17 for more tips and a great interview with Kip and Wendy about their parenting policies that worked!

5. The Ex is rarely completely out of your life or the lives of your children. If he/she has disappeared, then the absence of the “other” parent will impact your children. If the relationship with your Ex is volatile or confrontational, then the conflict between you will continue to negatively affect your children. Even if you have a cooperative co-parenting relationship with your Ex, having Mom and Dad in two separate locations is often hard for the children to navigate. Several of my clients have had to learn how to help their children transition from one home and set of rules to the other home and set of rules. It can be done, but it is extremely hard. From the child’s point of view, their preference would always be to have Mom and Dad and them under the same roof. (The only proven exception to this rule is when Mom and Dad’s relationship is violent and very abusive...unsafe for one parent and/or the children.)

The more quickly you can discard the unrealistic expectations listed above, the quicker you can begin adjusting your stepfamily to the strategies that have been shown in many research outcomes to help a stepfamily succeed.

DEFINITION OF A SUCCESSFUL STEPFAMILY: One in which the husband and wife are committed to learning and using respectful communication skills with each other, their children and stepchildren. Their expectations are realistic. Solutions to issues accommodate the stepfamily dynamic. The marriage is strong and loving. Honor is given to the other living or deceased biological parents and extended family. The children feel safe, cared for, and respected by the adults in their lives and their step-siblings.

Today you can order [Stepping TwoGether: Building a Strong Stepfamily](#), a book that condenses the research outcomes into simple lists of Building Blocks and Stumbling Blocks with comprehensive interviews of step-couples who are successful! A **Stepping TwoGether Edition of Millionaire Marriage Club** will be launched soon. Check the www.MillionaireMarriageClub.com for the launch date. This amazing course combines learning great communication skills with learning and implementing stepfamily strategies that succeed.

You have my best wishes and support,

Nancy Landrum

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