

# BLENDING FAMILIES

## *Helping Children Adjust*

Today with more than half of all marriages ending in divorce, and the majority of divorced individuals finding new partners, the number of blended families is growing. Children from blended families may have as many as eight people in their lives who consider themselves to be their grandparents, for example. This is only one of many blended family issues which can be confus-

issues like who has authority over which kids and when, who watches the kids when spouses are away, and how are visitation provisions accommodated. Encourage open communication and cooperation between the adults first—then work on the kids.

### **Don't Ignore Feelings**

A step-parent/stepchild relationship can foster all sorts of emotions, some wonderful and some not. Keeping communication lines open and honest is essential. Sometimes parents and children can subconsciously compete for the attention of the other parent or vice versa. These feelings should be recognized but minimized. Competitive feelings may also be brought up if one parent seems to be favoring their biological children. A situation like this can generate great hostility for all involved and needs to be confronted and corrected early on.

Discipline can also present some problems. Step-parents should try to remember that they are starting from scratch—there is no shared history with the children and no blood bond. So it may take a little extra patience and perseverance to gain the respect and trust of a new mate's children.

When all family members can be honest about their feelings and work together, blended families offer opportunities to share unique and special joy.

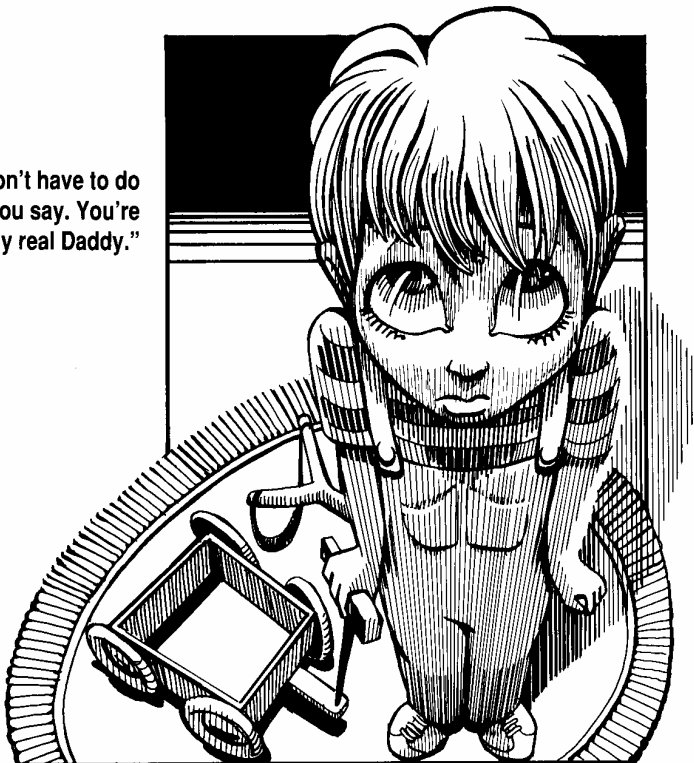
### **Emphasize Good Things**

There are many things a blended family has that a traditional nuclear family does not. They have the opportunity to share new skills and interests with each other, to learn new customs and rituals, and to have more diverse companionship within the household. It sometimes helps to emphasize these positive aspects of stepfamily relationships, and to minimize or dispel the nasty "Cinderella" picture many of us have been taught to envision and dread.



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"I don't have to do what you say. You're not my real Daddy."



ing to children. Here are some suggestions for ways to minimize the confusion and stress that can accompany the formation of new families.

### **Make Peace**

Talk together about your concerns and feelings when you start contemplating living with someone who also has children. Include ex-spouses and try to confront

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