



RE-MARRIAGE WHEN YOU HAVE A CHILD ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM

Bringing a new member into any family can be a significant challenge. There are so many things to consider in any remarriage situation, and when there are children with special needs the challenges can be even greater! For example, make sure you take time to consider:

- Your relationships with one another
 - Parent – child
 - Sibling – step-sibling
 - Step-parent – step-child
 - Partner/spouse relationship
- The reality and demands of everyday life
- Finances

Relationship Issues

Relationships don't happen overnight or just because you have a marriage certificate. Give your children time to adjust to the new situation. Before you remarry (and ideally before you become engaged), begin by spending brief, planned, fun visits together for the children to really get to know their soon-to-be step-parent and new siblings. Gradually increase the amount of time the families spend together, reassuring children in the original family of your love and allegiance. Make sure to talk about what the children should call their step-parent. Don't forget to consider how this might affect the feelings of your ex-spouse too.

Recognize that relationships will evolve over time. The "honeymoon period" may apply to your children and their relationship with your new spouse and with their step-siblings as much if not more than it applies to the newlyweds. When your children and step-children fight and disagree, recognize that this is normal. Children from the same birth parents also fight. Handle disagreements fairly and try to make sure both you and your new spouse agree about how to handle any

issues that arise.

Where to Live?

In most remarriages, at least one person has to move. Other family members may have to share space that once belonged to them alone. These are issues you need to consider and discuss with your children. Some families find, if finances allow, that moving into a home new to all is the best way to avoid territoriality. If you move, though, will this impact where your children go to school? If step-siblings will attend the same school (particularly if they are in the same grade), make sure you discuss your children's feelings about this and preemptively plan for any issues that may arise.

Day to Day Activities

Birth parents don't always agree on how to raise a child. This is equally true for blended families. Some parents set clear expectations and consequences for actions/inaction, while others take a more relaxed approach. Before your remarriage, make sure you discuss issues of discipline, work responsibility (parents' and children's), and appropriate leisure activities. Will the day to day and weekly routines and rituals remain the same? How and who will discipline the children? Do you and your partner have similar or different discipline styles? Will the children be allowed to climb into bed with the parents on weekend mornings? Be sure to alter family routines and rituals slowly and acknowledge the differences.

Special Occasions

In most families, birthdays and holidays become ritualized events. This may be true for your children, especially your child on the autism spectrum, even if you aren't aware of it. Make sure you discuss any changes in how celebrations will be handled in your new expanded family. Quite likely, the two families which have become one will be used to different traditions, eat different foods, and have different schedules. Talk about the differences, and make a plan on what you will do before the special occasion happens.

Preparing Your New Spouse for a Family Member on the Autism Spectrum

As you well know, raising a child on the autism spectrum is rarely easy. You will need to make sure your new spouse is prepared for what life is like with your child

- the good and the bad. Your spouse-to-be should spend plenty of time around your child before the marriage, but don't pressure either your future spouse or your child to become best buddies. All relationships take time to develop.

Talk with your future spouse about your child's development, including early struggles that have been overcome. Talk about all the work your child and you did to help make progress, and celebrate together the successes while recognizing and prioritizing areas for improvement. Share your goals for your child and your need for support along the way to meeting them. Make sure your future spouse knows the costs for treatments your child receives, as well as anticipated costs for future treatment, housing, vocational training, etc.

It is important that you and your future spouse agree with the general approach to working with and disciplining your child on the autism spectrum. Consistency is key for your child, and your child will be confused if you and your future spouse are too different in your approach. Your future spouse should witness your child having a melt-down or becoming frustrated. Let your spouse-to-be watch how you handle difficult moments, and discuss why you act as you do. If you didn't handle a situation ideally, acknowledge that and talk about how you might do things differently another time. Let your spouse-to-be know that you don't expect him or her to get it all right all of the time. All parents make mistakes and can improve - regardless of whether they are a birth parent or step-parent.

Related Articles:

- [Life Cycle Events](#)
- [Separation and Divorce in Families Living with ASD](#)
- [Moving to a New Home](#)

Additional Resources:

- [Surviving and Thriving as a Stepfamily](#)

Additional Reading:

Married with Special-Needs Children: A Couples' Guide to Keeping Connected, by Laura E. Marshak and Fran P. Prezant; Woodbine House Inc., 2007. This book deals with marital issues in light of the demands of raising a child with developmental disabilities, a serious medical condition, or mental health issues. The authors have

included a chapter on remarriage.

Remarried with Children: Ten Secrets for Successfully Blending and Extending Your Family, by Barbara LeBey; Bantam Dell, 2005. This is a practical book about blending two families into one. Practical applications as well as warnings of unanticipated issues are discussed including finances, disgruntled exes, and disagreeing step-siblings.

Do You Sing Twinkle? A Story About Remarriage and New Family, by Sandra Levins; American Psychological Association, 2009. The story is told from a boy's point of view and touches upon the issues and questions children may have as part of a "new" blended family.

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