

Nine Ways to Build, Foster and Sustain a Strong, Genuine, and Loving Relationship with your “New” Children

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Joining and creating your new family may feel like a daunting and intimidating task, full of apprehension and trepidation. Below are nine ways to ease the transition:

[Note: this article is primarily written for the person who is joining a new family on his/her own; modifications in the “ways” should be made for families where each partner has his/her own children - see other articles on this subject]

1. Be present in the children’s “orbit”.

Ideally, this involves being present and “hovering” in the children’s “orbit”, while at the same time not violating their personal space.

2. Let the children come to you.

Allow the children to come to you when *they* are ready and on their own terms.

Gradually allow yourself to become involved in their lives.

Put the children first.

In the *conscious parenting* and *interpersonal design* models, being aware of the “dance” of reaction and interaction between you and the children is key.

Know that if you “push”/force or impose yourself on the children, they will most likely resist you and may react by feeling resentful and irritated.

2[a]. Create positive, good-feeling-based associations and situations

A relatively safe way to accomplish this may be to discover and do [fun] activities with the kids. [Going to the movies; zoo; reading stories; dance; art; hiking; walks; beach; sports; swimming]. The goal is to create and sustain interactions with the children that are full of positive feelings and positive-feeling-associations

Ask the children what they like to do, and what they want to do. Offer to spend time with them. This allows you to build a relationship. [Consider whether you wish to do some of this with each child separately; and whether you wish to spend some time with the children on your own and without their biological parent]

3. Know and remind yourself that you are not the children’s parent.

It is preferable to not define yourself as the children’s parent. Instead, it may be much more emotionally healthy and appropriate for you and the children if you maintain an attitude of being someone very important and significant in their lives, and if you DO NOT act as if you

are their biological parent.

The idea here is that your underlying attitude influences and effects your overt actions.

Many new “parents” use their first names when speaking with the children. If the children decide to call you “mom” or “dad”, fine. They may feel confused, though, if you use this word/term/label.

Know your appropriate place, in relation to your family and the children.
Know that it is risky to attempt to replace or transplant the children’s biological parent/s.

4. Develop and design a plan with your partner/spouse.

Find the time to sit down with your spouse/partner to discuss how you plan to parent and relate to his/her children. It is best if you can find a consensus on how you will do this.

5. Honor the children’s feelings [see upcoming article on *Common Feelings of Children of Divorce*]

Do your best to be kind and understanding [empathize]with the children.
It helps to realize that they have not chosen you to enter into their lives. You and your partner have, in most situations, made this decision.

A lot of the children’s behaviors and reactions may be association with their feeling a sense of powerlessness and lack of control; they may act-out to reassert and claim their sense of control over their lives.

6. Learn to listen to the children.

Refer to my articles on Listening to Your Child – *Nourish Your Child With the Gift of Listening*, and *Nine Steps to Improve How You Listen to Your Child*.

Acknowledge and validate what the children are feeling and where they are at.

Refer to my articles on listening – “Nourish your Child with the Gift of Listening” series – for more detailed information on this topic.

7. Gain awareness of and honor your own feelings.

Expect that this process will, at times, be difficult for you.

Know that the children may “push” you, challenge you, and test your limits.

Expect that, during this journey, you will feel and experience a wide range of feelings. such as: feeling apprehensive, feeling a sense of trepidation, and feeling uneasy and nervous.
[common feelings: angry; frustrated; reactive; despondent; discouraged; down]

Allow yourself to feel your feelings. If you are able to, be kind to yourself and accept that it

is normal and natural to feel these feelings. Give yourself permission to be “human” and real. Give yourself permission to be sincere and to be yourself with the children.

8. Expect to go through a series of “phases” in your journey-relationship with the children. [See upcoming article on *Phases in your Journey*] [Note: all families go through different phases, for different time periods]

9. Remember that each child is unique.

Allow your relationships to grow and develop organically. Anticipate that you will form different relationships with each child. You will probably feel closer and more connected to certain children, and less naturally connected with others.

Realize that this is the beginning of a process of adjusting and readjusting - for the children, for your spouse, and for you - to your new family situation.

Remember, and continuously remind yourself: Children are a blessing; and children are a gift from God.

Get professional help, if necessary.

Books, parent groups, consultations. Expand your knowledge and wisdom.

For more articles by and information about Dr. Richman see www.drraf.com

Get help from, take advantage of, and learn from the many useful **resources**.

- books for parents

- books for kids

- computer games for kids [e.g., Earthquake in Zipland game]

These games/aids can help children to cope with, process, deal with, express and talk about what they are experiencing and going through, in a safe manner.

Children are more able to express their feelings and talk about what is going on for them through a non-threatening medium – art, dance, books, games, and stories.