



Investing in a Second Marriage

Ron Wall, Extension Specialist in Family Economics and Management

Second marriages are different

When two people come together in a second marriage, they bring with them a history of expectations and commitments that tempers their resolve. There may be differences in customs and practices, as well as differences in possessions, income, and wealth. There may also be differences in commitments to children and parents. As much as we would all like to believe that love conquers all, love can sometimes use a helping hand when it comes to the economics of family life.

Investments in children may differ

The chances for a successful marriage can be greatly enhanced when both partners believe that their interests are being treated fairly. This is particularly important when it comes to children. Economically speaking, children are a big investment. They cost a lot of money to feed, clothe, and shelter. But they cost even more to educate, develop, and nurture. Everything from dance lessons and activity fees to braces and college tuition are an investment in their future. This represents a big sacrifice on the part of any parent, but it may mean even more to a stepparent with competing self- and family interests.

Sacrifices should be recognized

Stepparents must be able to invest large sums of time, energy, and money in the progeny of their partner. Many stepparents do so marvelously. After all, marriage does mean one for all and all for one. But it is not easy for all to do this, and it should not be presumed to be easy. It is one thing to say, "If you love me, you will love my children," but it is quite another to make the sacrifices that this involves. Biological parents usually have no trouble seeing their children's interests as coincidental with their own. This may not be the same for someone who has no children or has children living with an ex-spouse. Despite the best of intentions, benefits beyond basic support given to one family may feel like benefits taken from the other.



Below are some ways for biological parents to deal with such situations in ways that will lessen resentment and encourage a natural melding of self- and family interests.

Share the rewards of parenting

Generously share the personal satisfactions and rewards that come from your children's accomplishments. If a parent consciously or subconsciously excludes the stepparent from

being part of his or her children's successes, the stepparent is less likely to feel bonded to the interests of those children. The parent should try to be very careful to proclaim any successes as those of *our* children if he or she does not want any failures to be viewed as those of *his* or *her* children.

Avoid shielding children from the stepparent

The parent should avoid shielding his or her children from the authority of the stepparent. While children should be protected from any kind of abuse, it does no good to allow them to sidestep the authority of a stepparent. If a parent wants the stepparent to share in the responsibilities and investments of rearing the children, it does little good to allow them to run to him or her for a better deal every time a problem arises. This means that the parent must stop intervening and interceding on behalf of the children. The children must learn to relate to the stepparent, and the stepparent must have authority over the children.

Encourage independent involvement

The parent should encourage and provide opportunities for the stepparent and children to relate to each other independently. It is not uncommon for a recently married parent to communicate to the stepparent on behalf of the children and to be always with them both whenever they interact. But how can a stepparent become part of the children's lives if all interactions are done by proxy? A parent should be watchful, but stepparent and children cannot bond without opportunities to speak directly and do things together.