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for Stepparents!

Celebrating 10 years helping stepfamilies worldwide to succeed!

A free newsletter for stepparents, by stepparents, about stepparenting issues since 1996

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Inside this issue:

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Coach's Corner

by Bob Collins, STEPcoach©

Isn't it exciting being in a stepfamily!! All the challenges, all the trials, all the opportunities to scream!

With the change of weather and season, we also get an opportunity to change our attitudes toward those challenges. Just as the brown of last summer turns into the colors of autumn, why don't you look at this as a good time to turn your brightest colors on for you family? Show 'em what you're made of! Really teach them how you wish they would treat you! Love them until they just fold up and give in and start paying you back with love.

I know (believe me - I KNOW!) that it can seem like it's hopeless sometimes. But remember back to three months before you joined this new family - remember how excited you were to get it going - remember your passion, your hope, your dreams, and start all over again.

If it feels like everything has fallen apart, it hasn't really. Find one thing, just one thing, that's going pretty well. Then latch onto that one thing and begin building around it. You have inside you what it takes to succeed in spite of all the frightening challenges in your home. Statistics show over and over that couples who feel like their marriage is failing - but who stick with it anyway - will in about five years testify that their marriages rate from good to great. Something about going through hard times together; about never giving up despite the harshness; about building common experiences of success build stronger relationships. These couples begin to realize that they actually have a real partner for life.

Maybe that partner isn't the dynamic rescuer you hoped they would be, but as long as they are there - they are there! They are still committed. And so should you be, too!

Don't let yourself be distracted from your original dream. Yes, it's tough. Yes, it's more than you expected. But - believe me on this one - the toughest relationships to build are the ones that are sweetest and most appreciated later on. It's the easy ones that fall apart so easily.

So take the challenge. Stick with it. Smile at those scowls you get. Let your mantra be, "I don't care, I love you anyway!" And build yourself a family and a future on the foundation you've already started.

If you need help keeping going, just let me know. I've coached many a wounded soul onto victory.

Just don't give up!

God bless your whole family!

Bobby Collins, CDM

Founder and Director of STEP-Carefully!

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LETTER from a stepparent, Just like you!

Question:

what if there is a stepfamily in the world that doesnt believe in CHURCH or God? then what? are they automatically doomed for failure?

Hello,

Of course not. Just as businesses that don't acknowledge God can succeed. The basic laws of order remain in place. The Bible says "For God gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and on the unjust, too." (Matthew 5.45) Gravity and a tall cliff can kill both believers and non-believers alike. And, in the same way, doing the right things in raising stepchildren will work for Christians and non-Christians, as long as those right things are done consistently and with the proper attitude of love and patience for the children and each other.

Where the Christian has an edge (in my humble but experienced opinion) is that they can turn to a higher power for active assistance with that patience and love in difficult situations. When a person becomes a Christian, they receive a living, intelligent helper for tough situations. This is why through the ages, when faced with torture or death (which many stepparents can identify with!) many Christians have been able to stand firm in their convictions.

The historical Jesus, whom I worship as Lord, taught that even when we fail, we have His support. He said for us to aim for perfection (Matthew 5:48), but He readily and willingly forgave us for our failures to be perfect. Then He stepped in and helped us recover. That's why so many stepparents who saw no need for Jesus' help before, understand the common sense of accepting divine help after the challenges start.

I've never felt as threatened or challenged in my life, including the deaths of loved ones, a violent home invasion, and life threatening illnesses, as when I was dealing with a belligerent, hateful teenaged stepdaughter. The attacks came in my closest comfort zone. There was nowhere to run to hide, even for a brief break. I found solace by turning to the One who understood undeserved persecution and personal affronts. And, through His encouragement and personal uplifting, I was able to continue loving a vicious stepdaughter until the point, after four years of trials, that she said, "I give up; you win; I love you, too." I was then rewarded by a young lady who loved so freely that she even adopted my last name as a tribute to my undying love for her.

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm no spiritual superman. I wanted to run away many, many, many times. She insulted me publicly so often that I wanted so

say, "NO! She's NOT mine! I don't have anything to do with her!" But it was that encouragement from Christ ("But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" Matthew 5:44) and the very real support of His Spirit inside me that allowed me to smile when she did that and say that I loved her anyway. And those times are what won her over and made her become a sweet, kind, loving "daughter" to me that she is now, ten years later.

So, no, you don't have to be a Christian to succeed as a stepparent - but it sure makes sense to get all the help you can.

God bless your whole family!
Bob Collins, CDM

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Our Stepfamily Mediation/Coaching Program has helped hundreds of stepfamilies learn to grow beyond their greatest family challenges. Through private, personalized sessions via long distance telephone and email, I can guide you in developing strategies and practices to strengthen your family. Rebellious stepkids, troublesome ex-spouses, and couple conflicts are common stuff in a stepfamily - but they are also the killers that cause up to a 75 percent divorce rate for them. Don't try to beat those odds alone! Get help for your family's sake.

ARTICLE

Doggy kisses

by Bob Collins, CDM

In a recent survey I heard cited on a public radio program, the majority of married respondents to the survey actually admitted that they prefer to be kissed by their dog than by their spouse!

WHAT????!!! I couldn't believe my ears. Surely I'd heard wrong, but the commentator repeated the statistics. They prefer their dogs' affection over their mate's. At first I didn't believe it, but then I started thinking about the comparison.

Can you remember the last time you were kissed by a dog - maybe it was 'way back when you were a kid, maybe more recently. But think about how that dog, or even better, a puppy, approach the act of kissing your mug? Did he sit and hang his head, looking up at you with reluctant eyes as if he dreaded the moment he'd have to get around to it? Did she pull back from you if you lifted her up? Were his eyes telling you that this was a have-to-do chore? Or did he jump on you, nearly knocking you down, and practically drown you in his devotion and joy?

And what would have adversely affected his affection? What would have caused reluctance?

If you were dirty and smelly, would he have wrinkled up his nose and held back, thinking, "get yourself cleaned up first, then I'll kiss you"? Hardly! Most likely, rather than judging your state of kissability, he'd have enjoyed helping you get clean!

But, what about if you'd recently been cranky with her, maybe even acted mean to her, snapping at her because you were in a bad mood? Or getting angry with her because of something she shouldn't have done, but couldn't help or forgot not to do? What if she'd just been caught "loving" your favorite shoes to pieces - literally- out of misplaced affection?

You know what the answer is, if you've ever had a pet dog. Your worst mood can't diminish their love for you. And when you finally forgave them - oh! what ecstasy for them! Even the most abused dogs will literally jump at the chance to make up with their friend, washing away the past with loving slobbers!

Now ... when was the last time you were kissed that way, with that same level of enthusiasm and energy by your mate? More to the point, when did *you* last act like a happy puppy toward your mate, yourself? When did you look past how they looked or smelled; past how they had behaved recently; past how they had treated your prized possessions? When did you give them all the love you had?

If you treat your dog better than your spouse, or if your dog treats your spouse better than you do, you'd better back up and ask yourself if that's right. Whom do you love most? Whom do you show your love to most openly? And to whom did you make a vow to love them most forever?

Is it pride - fear someone will see you opening your heart and letting love run loose? Or is it just that you're too boring to love that completely? Is it a tightly held grudge over some relatively petty wrongdoing? (Yes, it is petty ... relatively -



compared to the love you felt three months before your wedding.) Have you let your priorities get all tangled up so you can't remember what you promised or why?

Remember you have a C-H-O-I-C-E! Bless your spouse today with doggy kisses. Challenge them to a wrestling match where nobody loses. Be a happy, goofy puppy when you see them and tell them it's because you're so much in love with them.

Doggy kisses ... "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." (!!)

Bob Collins, CDM

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