

Till Your Children We Do Part

Maybe it's time the traditional marriage vows were rewritten. Let face it, a large number of people who get married these days are often doing it for the second, third, or maybe even the eighth time. For many people however, myself no exception, the marriages fail because of friction between stepparents and stepchildren. Maybe we should just add an addendum to the wedding vows to give ourselves an easy out if the step kids don't meet our expectations.

Love, Honor, & Obey
For Better for Worse
In Sickness and in Health
Till Your Children we do Part

Does this sound familiar? Sara, I love you but I just can't handle the kids anymore. They don't respect me. You spend all your time catering to them. We are never alone.

Welcome to Reality 101.

Don't get me wrong. It's not easy tackling the role of a stepparent. Children can be downright brutal at times. Often they view the new person coming into their lives as an adversary. Young children who are cute and cuddly grow up to be teenagers. Face it. It's much easier accepting a teen coming home stoned at four in the morning when they are yours. You still want to kill them but you accept it. It's not so easy when you are the stepparent.

Unfortunately there are a large number of people who marry with blinders on looking only at their respective mate. They know you have children but just kind of expect that part to work out okay. If things don't go according to plan they cry foul. Sometimes they even demand that you choose between them and your children. Beginning to understand why stepchildren are the number one reason second marriages fail?

Having made a feeble attempt to show empathy toward the stepparent let me move on. I have heard a number of people, both male and female, blast their stepchildren or their spouses because of them. Okay, if your spouse hid their children under a rock and the day after your wedding shouted, "Surprise" then maybe you have a legitimate complaint. If however the kids have been there since day one and life has just hit a bump in the road, well, I hate it for you. Children are not the enemy. They are just struggling to grow up. Sometimes I think stepparents need to do the same.

Regardless of the age of the child whether toddler, adolescent, pre-teen or teen, there are issues they will face because of divorce. Add to that the reality that sometimes you have an ex-spouse on the outside complicating things further and life can be pretty tough on both child and stepparent.

It takes a really special individual to reach out to a child that is not theirs. I know it can be done. I've seen it. Children in extended families are simply trying to understand why things are the way they are. Often a child feels as though they have already lost one parent and expects you to leave them as well. To test this theory they may display their worst behavior. Sadly, children are often right. When they need to be reassured and loved the most stepparents often turn and walk away. This is when you need to hug them, look them in the eye and tell them you love them and are not going to leave. Say it again and again, I am not going to leave. I've heard stepparents make comments like, The kids should be glad I'm here. After all, I don't have to be here. Folks, I hate to break it to you but kids can see through insincerity quicker than we saw through Bill Clinton's definition of what constitutes sexual relations.

Forgive me if I am painting a bleak picture here. It's not my intent. We are talking about children here and as a father of four and stepparent of two more I've got to tell you kids are pretty special to me. Think before you walk. If your potential spouse has children whether they have custody or not the children are part of the marriage. You need to accept that before you say I do.

Think before you walk down the aisle. Think before you walk out when things get tough. These aren't little pieces of furniture that two people fight over and divide up during divorce. Children are living, breathing miracles that given the opportunity and right amount of love can become a wonderful part of your life. Does it come easy? No. That's the reality of it and I can't change that. Is it worth it? You bet it is. It takes the effort of two people in love, a lot of patience, a lot of love, and if necessary some counseling.

If you are currently in a marriage involving stepchildren and are considering leaving because of problems you feel they are causing I implore you to reconsider. There are wonderful family counselors and therapists who can help. Often it helps just to know that you are not alone. Many of the issues you are facing daily are being dealt with by couples all over the country. Also keep in mind that ultimately you are dealing with a short-term problem. Four or five years dealing with a troubled teen are nothing compared to a lifetime of happiness with your spouse.

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