Forming new bonds and relationships when it comes to blended families can sometimes be difficult. It’s different for each family, depending on the dynamics of each blended family and each situation, and it’s often the most difficult for the children involved. It is very important for you to be understanding of a child’s feelings during this time of change when they are learning how to adapt to a new member in the household. Here are some suggestions for helping your child adjust to a new stepparent.

• **Give it time:** It can take a very long time to adjust to new family members living together under the same roof. Avoid trying to force bonds to form immediately. Instead be patient and supportive as children get to know a new stepparent and get used to sharing their home with them.

• **Communicate often:** Allow children to express their feelings. Even though you may think the new husband/wife is the perfect fit, your child may not feel the same way. They were not the decision maker of this new arrangement, and probably dream of having the old family

**ADJUSTING TO LIFE WITH A STEPPARENT**

By Jane Greminger

Nokomis Child Care Centers

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**Q: I’m struggling with co-parenting with my ex. How can we work together in a way that’s best for the kids?**

A: There are many struggles that go with co-parenting after separation or divorce. Healthy, productive communication is key. Here are some tips to help keep communication with your former spouse on track.

• **Reduce conflict to a minimum especially when the children are around.** Don’t stay in a conversation if it isn’t helpful or productive. Instead, end the conversation and suggest a later time to talk about issues that can’t be resolved in the moment.

• **Validate concerns, agree to consider suggestions, and, if needed, take time to make decisions.**

• **Don’t allow yourself to initiate or get hooked into negative communication.** Don’t criticize or become contentious by using put-downs or name-calling or cursing or swearing at your ex. Do what you can to keep the communication positive.

• **If communication is consistently negative look for other options for getting important information relayed.** Suggest alternatives for communication such as: having a friend or neutral family member present to keep communication healthy, meeting in a public location for custody
arrangement back. Feelings of anger, rejection, and even abandonment may result when a child has lost the daily presence of one of their parents (if it’s a divorce situation). These mixed feelings may also arise when a child is feeling left out because they now have to share you with another individual (the stepparent). Encourage your child to talk openly about their thoughts and let them know that you will work through anything with them.

• **Promote balance and respect:** Assure the child that this new family arrangement is not a replacement for any of their original family members. You can support this by continuing to cherish old family traditions, as well as developing new ones. Expect that everyone in the household respect one another, no matter how long it takes to adjust to the new living circumstances. Find a balance for “choosing your battles” with the child, and try not to overreact if a child expresses negative feelings toward a stepparent. It is likely and normal that a child will hold some resentment and display emotional outbursts from time to time. Please remember though, he/she is the child and you and your spouse are the adults who must acknowledge the child’s hurt and help them work through it.

• **Develop solutions:** Come together as a unit and establish clarifications about space, titles, authority, etc. Perhaps schedule family meeting nights where you keep the lines of communication open to discuss these topics or any other issues and share feelings. Determine common goals where everyone needs to put forth an effort to be as respectful and considerate of other family members as possible. Seek additional help if necessary. If a child never seems to come to terms with this new arrangement, then you may want to arrange for them to see a mental health consultant. Do all that you can to help create positive bonds among all of you.

**Counselor Column, From Front**

exchanges, and/or going to a counselor or mediator to help with difficult issues. Remember that children do better when their parents are not hostile towards each other. Keep the children’s best interests in mind when trying to communicate.

• Choose who you want to be. Leave the past behind. No more complaining or blaming. It is the present that is important. Decide, starting from today, who you want to be and what is needed to get there. Holding on to anger and resentment will not only make co-parenting more challenging, but will also hurt you and your children.