

Ten Tips For The Second Wife Who Marries a Man With Children

by Stephanie Knobel

- **Don't think everything is going to be hunky-dory when you marry someone whom was previously married and has children.**

Even in the best of situations, there are going to be problems with adjusting. Even when the adjusting is done there will still be problems. Get over it. That's life. Even in a so-called "normal" intact families children play one parent against the other and cause general chaos in their parent's lives. Parents all over the world have trouble finding time to be alone. Your situation will be no different. Try to go with the flow and realize that this is completely normal. Remember that it takes about three years for a blended family to start acting like a family. Don't rush the process. I know you're in love and you have that overwhelming it's Us against the world feeling, which is wonderful, but try to be realistic.

- **Don't rush into having your own child together.**

Statistics show that women entering a marriage with a man who already has children have another child within two years of marriage. It almost seems like a contest. It is understandable that you want to show him that parenthood doesn't have to be so hard. It is normal to want to have your own children to further your bond with your spouse. However, please give it time. It really is better to allow the entire family to adjust before bringing more children into the situation. If your biological clock is ticking I can understand the rush, but if you have years before you have to worry about that consider giving your marriage about three years before bringing more children into it. Second marriages fail at a rate of 85% compared to 50% of first marriages. Most second wives are in their first marriages. Looking at these marriages it is easy to figure out that added children cause more stress when the first situation is not resolved. Over all most marriages that are going to fail do so within two years of the woman giving birth. There is no doubt that children, financial problems, and unresolved issues with ex spouses contribute to the high divorce rate among second marriages. It doesn't have to if you take your time.

- **Don't obsess about the situation with his Ex Wife.**

I know that is easier said than done. If you don't think you're obsessing but you bring it up or have to discuss her every single day, or most days out of the week, then it's time to take an honest assessment of your situation. I know if you're one of the people who have a crazy Ex Wife to deal with that this will be doubly hard for you. But if you force yourself not to react to her you'll live a happier life and prolong your marriage. Get caller ID and don't pick up the phone when it's her unless you have to. Then if she's calling to whine and complain just say "He's not here right now I'll leave him a message." Click. If you train yourself not to react to her eventually it will become second nature and she will give up her games. Games are only fun if everyone is participating. If there are legal issues let your lawyer and her lawyer deal with it. Don't enter into the fray there is no point in it. It will only make things worse. You don't need to know everything there is to know about his Ex. It will only cause you to think about her more than you already do. Curiosity is normal but don't let it take over your life. Even if your husband doesn't mean to do it, the things he says about his Ex won't really

be the entire truth. It takes two to end a marriage. Both were at fault. But the fact is, it really doesn't matter. You are married to him and that is all that matters now.

- **Allow your husband to deal with the Ex Wife regarding the children or money issues**

This will be one of the hardest things for you to do. Leave this situation to your husband. Even if you feel he's being walked on and turning into a wimp when it comes to her you're not doing your marriage any good by taking over the situation or nagging your husband into doing things he doesn't want to do. If the situation is important enough to him, he will do something about it himself. He is a grown man and doesn't need you to take over the job his mommy should have completed before turning him out into the world. I know this is difficult believe me, but it is imperative that you have a hands off attitude when it comes to these issues for the sake of your marriage. If you have to, get counseling to help you deal with the feelings of loss of control over your future and to help you stay out of it. Eventually you will be able to be calm about staying out of the fights, the parental disagreements, the money situation, but as with everything, it takes practice and time.

- **Model good morals and behavior for your step children but don't try to be the Mom.**

You definitely have a parenting role in your step children's lives. There is no doubt about that. But you aren't the mom. Except in the rare cases where you are in fact the custodial step parent the parent with custody will be making the rules as to the moral behavior of her children. You have every right to have your own rules in your home and you should expect those rules to be obeyed. It's up to their father to make them behave in your house. If he won't do anything then you will have to try but my suggestion is to talk to him when the children aren't around. If he doesn't have the same rules you do then you're just probably going to have to suck it up while the kids visit unless they're hanging off the rafters and doing illegal drugs. Use your judgment but tread lightly on parenting issues. You are a role model but you aren't the mommy. It's hard to define because each situation is different. After you've been in the family for a few years the children may become very comfortable with you and call you mom. That is perfectly fine, but in the beginning don't take that role allow the children to give it to you. They will, give them time.

- **Don't tell him what to say while he is on the phone with her**

This goes back to letting him deal with her. I know it's hard not to sit there and wring your hands when he wimps out. I know you're tempted to pass notes to him about what to say to her while he's on the phone with her. Remember, you really cannot hear the other side of the conversation. This is also going to irritate your husband and cause problems between you and him. Why let her have that much control over your life. Let him have his conversation without you right under him. Leave the room. Then when he's done, come in and give him a hug and kiss and suggest doing something fun. Sex is always good. Build his self-esteem rather than tear it down and you'll find he may become more aggressive with her on his own.

- **Allow him to spend time with his children alone**

In the beginning it will be easier for everyone if you allow him to spend time with his kids without you being around. After a few years that probably won't be necessary but at first when the kids visit, make yourself scarce unless they invite you along. They will invite you. Don't make them think you don't want to be around, make it clear that you feel they need time alone with their dad, if anyone needs you, they know where to find you. In early marriage it's common for newlyweds to sit right on top of each other. When the kids are there, back off, let the kids sit with their daddy. In intact marriages by the time the kids come the parents automatically back off so the kids can get that closeness from their parents. If you're like most families you only have the kids every other weekend so it's not going to hurt to allow them this time.

- **Don't become the butler, cab driver, or the maid**

These are His children. Let him clean up after them, drive them around, pick them up, and wait on them if that is what he wishes to do. So often the second wife starts feeling resentful about the amount of housework she is expected to do when the children are visiting. It's likely his former wife felt resentful about this too. Keep note of this because that is probably what he'll do when you have your own children. It's not that he's a bad man. Society makes it easy for men to opt out of child care, and house work. Even today with women's lib and equal rights being expected these types of jobs are often relegated to the women. We women allow it to happen. If you don't want to feel resentful do not allow it to happen. If you set the boundaries in the beginning you're going to be a lot happier when you bring your own children into the family. Men are just as capable as women of changing diapers, driving kids to soccer practice, feeding them dinner and yes even washing their clothing! Now, the trick is, don't say a word when he does it "wrong"... let him do it however he does it. He'll eventually realize pretending to do it wrong won't get you to do it. He can read directions, let him figure it out. This is not to say you cannot choose to help him out in tight spots but don't take his place. All too often it seems like everything to do with the children is done by the wives (both old and new) rather than between the Ex Wife and the Father.

- **Don't write the Ex Wife letters unless she does first**

Sometimes new wives feel compelled to write the Ex wife. I am not sure why. It's either to mark her territory or to try to assuage guilt if the new wife was the other woman. Writing her especially under the latter conditions will only cause problems. After you've established your marriage if she's not made the first move in a couple of years then I think it's O.K. to write her if you're writing a nice letter suggesting coffee or to tell her what a great job she's doing as a parent. Don't think writing her about how big of a pain she is will help. It won't. It would be nice if it would but she won't see that in the letter. She will see that you stole her husband and now you want her kids too. Whether that is true or not, and I'm sure it isn't, that is how she's going to feel. Don't add fuel to the fire. Stay detached. It's not likely you will ever be friends with this person. You can be friendly but likely never friends. Also, don't write letters for your husband. A lot of second wives do this. I am not sure why but it goes back to the compulsion to tell him what to say to her on the phone. Don't do this either. Leave their relationship to them. If the Ex Wife writes you and it's a nice letter thanking you for being a part of the children's lives or something else nice then it is O.K. to respond in kind. If the Ex Wife writes you a nasty letter, file it away for any possible court cases in the future but do not write her back or acknowledge the letter. Learning to just ignore bad behavior is a great lesson for every person to learn. It comes in handy when we have children. The very worst thing that can be done to someone is to be ignored. Don't tell her you're

sending it to your lawyer, don't tell her she's going to regret it, don't even act like you got it. If she tries to discuss it with you, hang up, walk away, smile be above it all.

- **Enjoy your marriage**

You are his wife. You are not second. I know it feels that way because of the children but most of the time when it comes to kids, any parent, step, mom, dad, whatever sometimes feels second. Their needs have to come before our wants. That's just the way it is. It's doubly hard when you are dealing with a crazy Ex or Step-Children from hell. We all know these situations exist. You are married to him, not her. You have him. Don't push him away. Don't make your entire relationship about the Ex and the Step-Children. While it's sometimes hard to do, you and your husband are a couple in your own right, without the children. Yes he was a package deal but you don't want the times the children aren't there to still be focused on the Ex and the children. She is not your ex wife, she is his problem. Men seem to be better at compartmentalizing their lives than women. It is a skill I recommend we all try to learn. Leave work at work and the Ex at her house. When the children are not with you focus on yourselves as a couple. You're lucky, in tact parents don't get to do this. Enjoy it while you can because when you have your own children life will change more than you realize. Best wishes.

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