

## **When You're a Bride with Kids The Delicate Balance**

"I feel like I have a split personality," said Carla. "Marrying Jack is a dream come true. But it's not a dream for Kim and Dan at all. I'm torn between being blissfully happy and wracked with guilt. Carla is not alone. Brides with kids often feel torn between their wedding dreams and the complicated realities of being a mom.

One reason for this is that our images of weddings have not kept pace with reality. A wedding in which one or both partners have children is still often referred to as "non-traditional." Yet, in "The Enlightened Stepmother," Perdita Kirkness Norwood points out that about 40% of all marriages are now remarriages for one of the adults. Most of these men and women have children. Brides with kids are our new tradition, but our wedding culture still clings to the image of the young, innocent bride, being given away by her parents.

According to Carla, "Getting married the second time is an entirely different experience. You still want to be the bride, you want it to be all about you. But when you're a mom, it's always about the kids, right? Otherwise, what kind of mom are you?"

With a wedding in their future, Carla's children needed some extra attention. Yours probably will, too. Expect them to a wide range of feelings, from excitement to fear to despondence. It is always a huge adjustment for children to see their parents with a new partner.

Here are some suggestions I gave Carla for keeping her balance and making the most of being a bride with kids.

### **Give It Time**

The first thing Carla needed to do was accept that each person in her family would experience the transition differently. She needed to give her fiancé and her kids the freedom to move through it in their own way and at their own pace.

As a bride, your transition is relatively simple and sweet. You love your fiancé, you love your children, and you really love the idea of all of you being a family.

Your children's transition is tougher, because did not choose it. Most likely, the idea of sharing you is daunting. For many kids, a parent's remarriage puts an end to their fantasy that their parents will reconcile. This means that they will be facing your divorce again, in a sense. They will be afraid that your new husband will make changes in the household that they do not like. At the same time, they may like your fiancé and have positive feelings about your marriage. This adds up to a lot of different feelings for a child. They need time to sort them all out.

Carla found out that she was making one of the most common mistakes: putting her fiancé in the role of disciplinarian before he really had a relationship with her kids. For a parent who's been doing it all alone, it can seem like a godsend to have help! However, it caused resentment in the children and actually got in the way of their developing a close relationship with Jack. They got along much better when Carla took charge again.

Developing routines, trust, and affection takes time and the timeline is different for each family. Carla tried to make some of the household changes before the wedding, to avoid making her fiancé look like the bad guy. For example, she planned to have Kim and Dan go to bed earlier, so she and Jack can have some couple time in the evenings. She decided to move the bedtimes up a couple months before the wedding.

### **Get informed**

Forming a stepfamily is a greater challenge than forming a first-time family. Couples routinely tend to underestimate the difficulties and then feel blindsided by problems later on. The

importance of preparation cannot be stressed enough. This can take the form of reading, going to classes, or seeing a counselor.

At first, this was the last thing Carla wanted to do. She wanted to just enjoy her engagement and let the serious stuff wait until after the wedding. But her kids wouldn't let her wait! They were "acting out," which made it hard for her to enjoy anything and so she did her homework.

" It's a good thing I did. Now that I know what to expect and we've made a few adjustments, the kids have settled down and we're all getting along better. I know we'll have challenges but we're getting off to a good start. No more split personality—I can be a good mom AND a happy bride."

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### **Resources for Brides with Kids**

- Weddings, a Family Affair: The New Etiquette for Second Marriages and Couples with Divorced Parents, by Marjorie Engel, Wilshire Publications, 1998.
- The Enlightened Stepmother, by Perdita Kirkness Norwood, Avon Books, 1999. (Great advice for all parents in a stepfamily.)
- Making Your Second Marriage a First-Class Success, by Doug and Naomi Moseley, Prima Publishing, 1998.
- Stepfamily Association of America, Inc., 800 735-0329 - email: [stepfamFS@aol.com](mailto:stepfamFS@aol.com) - website: <http://www.stepfam.org/>.

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