

Ask Miriam...

Individuals and families in the community are faced with challenging issues and concerns regarding their social, emotional and psychological health. Through the cooperation of **The Jewish World**, Miriam Adler of the Jewish Family Services will offer responses.

The following two letters represent some of the issues raised by families who have divorced and remarried or remained as single parent families after the divorce.

Q. Dear Miriam,

My question is not specifically about Passover, but the celebration of a holiday just brings our problems to the surface.

My husband and I both had previous marriages and children from those marriages. We also have two children from this marriage. Thus, we are dealing with a "blended family."

The problem is that our family never seems to blend to the degree we would like.

I feel that my stepchildren don't try hard enough to get along with our children.

My husband says that I am too critical and expect too much.

When my children from my first marriage go to their father's home, I have been told that I ask too many questions of them when they return.

What can we do to make the overall situation more pleasant and less stressful?

Blending Difficulties

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Q. Dear Miriam,

I am a single father of two children. My former wife and I have joint custody of the children. She has remarried and her husband also has children from a previous marriage.

When my children are with me, I hear them talk about their stepbrother and sister. There are a lot of behavior issues with their stepsister. I feel concerned that they are observing unhealthy behaviors and may be influenced by her since their stepsister is older and does a lot of things that sound exciting to my children.

What can I do to make sure my children don't follow her into trouble?

Worried Single Dad

A. Dear Blended Family,

I am sure that many families would agree that the joining of two families can sometimes feel more like a lumpy milk shake instead of a blend.

The term is blended, but no guarantees come with the product. For some parents the knowledge that their children are being raised, in part, by someone else is threatening.

Essentially, strangers are coming together and being asked to act as if they are a family.

Many parents put a lot of energy into preparing their children for the new arrangements, but fail to realize that time is needed to grow the relationship they have nurtured.

Be more realistic about expectations, and you will feel less disappointed. Also, you need to accept the fact that children and parents may never feel as close as desired.

Addressing the issue of how to handle what your children are telling you about the other parent's home, I urge you not to question them. If you question them you place them in the middle of the two families.

Do a lot of listening and if you hear about things that are dangerous or beyond reasonable limits, you need to address it with the other parent.

Similarly, if your children talk about their stepbrothers' or sisters' behavior, it is not the same as acting it out. Each time your children are with you, you are modeling what you expect. Most children learn to respect that expectation. When you are disturbed by what you hear or see, first ask yourself if you are looking through your eyes or your those of children.

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Miriam Adler, A.C.S.W., C.S.W., is assistant director of J.F.S. She answers most frequently asked questions. Please send questions to "Ask Miriam," c/o Jewish Family Services of NENY, 877 Madison Ave., Albany, NY 12208 or e-mail madler@jfsnny.org or call 518-482-8856.

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