

## Blended Family? Stepfamilies Are Like Quilts

By Judy Graybill



The term "blended" family is commonly used to refer to a stepfamily. It was coined because two families come together to presumably blend into one family. The reason I use the word presumably is because the two families usually don't blend together. They definitely start as two separate families and end as one family, but they don't blend. "Blending" implies that each of the separate parts, with distinct qualities, are all combined together to form one whole unit. In other words, a stepfamily is like a milkshake. Milk, sugar, ice-cream, fruit, and/or other ingredients that vary by family recipe, are all plopped into a blender. A button is pushed and the ingredients are mixed to form a flavorful concoction. With each bite, you don't specifically taste the sugar, milk, ice-cream, etc. You know that each is included, but you're only tasting the "blended" effect of everything together. You're now consuming one product, a milkshake, instead of multiple ingredients.

Stepfamilies are formed differently. Once the two families merge together, each one maintains its own identity. In time, the two families learn to complement each other and work together to function as one family - a stepfamily. In fact, the stepfamily even expands across two households when both biological parents have joint custody. In no way do the two mix together to become one new whole.

In my opinion, a stepfamily is like a quilt. It is made up of many different colors and styles of small patches. Yet, when the patches are laid next to each other in certain ways, it is undeniably beautiful. Some sections may be green. Some may be pink. Some sections are solid. Some have patterns. Some of the patterns are flowered, whereas some may be speckled with other prints. Each section maintains its own style. The solids never become patterns. The patterns never become solid. The pinks never turn into green. The greens never change into pink. Each section always looks different. The sections do not "blend" into each other or change, although they may fade as time passes. So is the way of a stepfamily. Each member is unique and special. When viewed individually, it may first seem that they are too different to work together and function as a unit. Yet, just as each section of a quilt is arranged in a particular way in order to create one functional piece - a quilt, each person takes the time to figure out his or her own place within the bigger family, the new stepfamily. Hence, just as small patches of fabric come together to function as one beautiful quilt, two families unite together to form one functional stepfamily.

Of course, quilts are not created overnight, unless you are an expert quilt-maker like my friend Deborah Torrance-Robinson. She can knock out a beautiful quilt from scratch in less than a day. However, people of average-to-low skill level spend a long time learning how to make a quilt, yet alone complete a beautiful functional piece. Picking out the fabric is the easiest part, although that in itself could take hours or months, depending on the person and what they find available. Then there is the matting that goes between the fabric, a special way of cutting, measuring, sewing, and much more. Deciding how each patch of fabric should be placed next to the others takes a special eye. Although any two patches of fabric can be sewn together, not all combinations will seem to fit appropriately. It depends on the colors and styles of each individual patch. With practice, and sometimes guidance, a quilt-maker learns how to arrange the different fabrics in order to make it pleasing to the eye, as well as functional.

In the same manner, each member of a stepfamily needs to take his/her time to figure out how he/she will fit into the new stepfamily. This could mean a physical arrangement of the bedroom, preferred names or nicknames (mom/dad vs 1st name), or order of birthright (the youngest may suddenly have a younger sibling) to name a few. The details of these types of issues vary per family and situation. Yet, in all circumstances, it takes a little time to figure out what is comfortable for each family member. Once each figures out his/her place within the family, and each member accepts the placement of each other family member, the stepfamily unit is complete and functional. Just like a quilt.