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## VOICES from the VILLAGE – Parenting in blended families

By Alexandra Muller Arboleda | December 2015

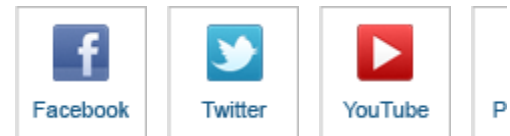
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### FAMILY TIME!

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Tania Lopez-Cepero, LPC, of Phoenix, is a licensed professional counselor and stepmom to Joseph (15), center, and Monica (19, not pictured) Velazquez. Husband David Velazquez is seated at left.

## TIPS FOR NAVIGATING NEW RELATIONSHIPS

*By Tania Lopez-Cepero, LPC*

The term “blended family” can be confusing because family members usually do not “blend” during the first few years.

Children are often grieving over changes in their families. They may be feeling anger, sadness, confusion or guilt about loyalties to biological parents.

Stepparents may feel the need to act like biological parents, but this can quickly backfire. The result can be frustration and anger. Biological parents may feel caught in the middle as they try to deal with the competing needs of children and spouses; and things can get more complicated once the new couple has children of their own.

Communication, patience and realistic expectations are key to the survival of a blended

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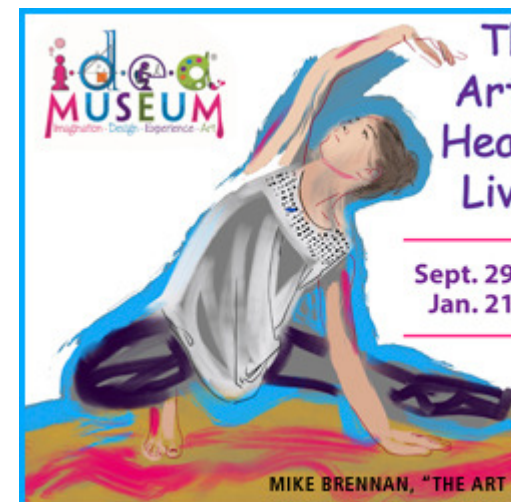
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### Try these helpful tips:

- Allow the children to set the pace of the relationship with the stepparent.
- Address children's feelings of guilt, anger, sadness or conflicted loyalties.
- Insist on respect among all family members.
- Allow children to spend individual and family time with the biological parent.
- As relationships develop, the stepparent should let the biological parent deal with discipline.
- Establish house rules for everyone to follow.
- Don't badmouth the other biological parent in front of the children.
- Spend time with your spouse. The stronger the spousal relationship, the better the chances for the new relationship to survive.



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Juli Maryhew, of Scottsdale, is a physical education teacher in the Scottsdale Unified School District and a health coach. She and her husband, Ron, have been married for seven years and have four children: Macall (19), Makenna (16), Karli (14) and Kaitlyn (11).



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## KNOW WHEN TO BE QUIET, PATIENT AND FLEXIBLE

*By Juli Maryhew*

I married my second husband, Ron, seven years ago. We have joined two families with four girls who genuinely love and care about each other.

From the time my husband and I first started dating, my younger daughter, Kaitlyn, and my husband’s older daughter, Macall, developed a close relationship. Kaitlyn looked up to Macall, who enjoyed taking care of Kaitlyn. This past summer, Kaitlyn insisted on going to the camp where Macall was working as a counselor.

Ron’s younger daughter, Makenna, and my older daughter, Karli—only two years apart—enjoy spending time together, too.

One of the major challenges of parenting and disciplining in a blended family is to know when to keep quiet. There have been times where I have interfered and should have let my husband handle situations involving his daughters.

Children living in two households bring clothes, backpacks, schoolwork, sports equipment, musical instruments and other belongings back and forth between two homes. It’s important to practice patience and understanding if things are forgotten at the other parent’s home. When kids are going in different directions and schedules are constantly changing, try to be flexible.



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Heather McManus Dimitro, of Phoenix, is the fitness supervisor for Omni Scottsdale Resort & Spa at Montelucia. She and her husband, Brian, enjoy spending time with sons Brendan (24, not pictured) and Shane (21) and daughter Ellie (14).

## DEVELOP NEW BONDS

*By Heather McManus Dimitro*

Combining families when only two people fall in love isn't always easy. My daughter Ellie and I had been on our own and doing fine until I started dating a wonderful man who was also the father of two boys (now 21 and 24). Ellie—10 years old at the time—wasn't too keen on the idea of sharing her mom.

But over time, I have seen Ellie thrive in a fun, positive family environment. My husband's sons, Brendan and Shane, like having a little sister.

Communication and fun, shared experiences have been the keys to our success as a blended family. Recently, Ellie went with her stepdad and stepbrother to learn how to play pool—and eat chicken wings—while I was working. They talked and laughed while Brian filled them both in on the coyote who recently made our street its home.

This was just one of the many experiences she will have with positive male role models in her life. The bond between Brian and my daughter is invaluable, especially now—

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during her teen years when mom isn't so "cool" anymore

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Tags: Arizona, blended families, families, kids, parenting, parents, stepparent, stepparenting

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## Alexandra Muller Arboleda



Alexandra Muller Arboleda is a freelance writer and the mother of Isabel (14) and Nicolas (11). She has worked as a water lawyer and a law and logic teacher. She is also certified to teach yoga.

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