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GETTING REMARRIED: WHAT ABOUT THE CHILDREN?

BY: Rev. BOB TOUSEY

The time has come; after years of being a single parent you have found the spouse of your dreams and you're ready to settle down. There is a lot of planning to do; select an Officiant, find a venue, select vendors, pick out the dress, prepare a guest list, the projects are endless. But if you have children, especially minor children, you have one very important job that is not on many wedding checklists - helping make the children accepting of the soon to be changing household and planning their role in the upcoming nuptials.

What happens early on can set the stage for the future relationship. Every situation is different. There is a lot to consider. There are a lot of feelings to be considered. If the children's other parent is alive and especially active in their lives the relationship with and the feelings of that parent must be considered. If the other parent is no longer living special attention must be given

As a wedding officiant, I have seen these situations handled well and have seen them mishandled. Personally, my dad passed away when I was 8 and while my mom did not remarry I know I would have had an issue with someone trying to take my dad's place. There was no replacing this great man in my mind. Having a step son, whose dad is still living, I was very careful to make sure he knew I loved him but was not trying to replace his dad.

My Step Son is Chris, he is a married dad himself now, but I first showed up on the scene when he was 5. When his mom and I made the decision to get married we talked about my role and decided that in the house I had to have the same authority as a parent would. Then one night, I made sure I put Chris to bed. I sat on the end of his bed and we talked about the upcoming wedding. I told him how much I loved him and I loved him as if he was my own son. But, that his dad also loved him and I was not going to try to take his dad's place. He was very lucky because he was going to have two men who loved him very much in his life. Then his mom and I sat down with him and told him about our discussion regarding parenting. I also made an effort to establish a good relationship with his dad. I think if that can be done it is important for the step parent to reach out to the other parent and let them know you love and care for their child and that you support their relationship.

Once the initial relationship building steps have been accomplished the next issue is what the child or children's role in the wedding should be. First, consider if the child wants a role in the wedding. Some children may be shy and just want to stay in the background while others like mine will want to have a very visible role. Do not force a child to do something they are uncomfortable doing.

Chris was our ring bearer. Daughters have traditionally been flower girls or junior bridesmaids. When my ex got remarried my daughter, Stephanie, who was 9 at the time, was the maid of honor. Older boys can serve as Groomsman. But there are many roles a child could have. The roles are only limited by your imagination. Here are a few suggestions.

Unity Candle. Traditionally, prior to the ceremony the Brides and the Grooms moms' each light a separate individual candle and after the vows the Bride and Groom each take the individual candles and light the unity candle. When there are children. The mom's could light additional individual candles for each of their grandchildren. When it comes time for the Unity Candle to be lit the children join the parents in lighting the Unity Candle to symbolize their new family.

Readings. Children can be readers at the wedding. They can read traditional Biblical readings, poems or even something they wrote themselves.

Prayers: The Children can lead or read prayers if it is a religious ceremony. One really nice prayer for a child to read is the Prayer for the Family. This is a very nice prayer that was originally written by Pope John Paul II. Even if you are not Catholic this is a very nice prayer for a wedding. This prayer is available for viewing in the ceremony ideas section of my web site www.religiousweddings.com

Vows. Including children in vows can be dicey for a lot of reason especially if the other parent is still active in the child's life. The vows sometimes can be misunderstood, but carefully drafted can be a nice addition to the ceremony. My web site www.religiousweddings.com offers some suggestions on family vows.

Another idea about vows. Instead of having the child join you in vows, he or she can be up on the Alter with you holding his parent's hand as the vows are exchanged. If there is more than one child the children could all be on stage holding hands together near the Bride and Groom. This is especially nice if both the Bride and Groom have children.

Rings: I serve as a remarriage expert on www.gettingremarried.com and recently I was presented with a question that was interesting. Apparently, the bride's 8 year old daughter and the soon to be step father have a great relationship and love each other very much. The Groom suggested that he present his "new" step daughter a ring at the

wedding. I and the other experts were a little concerned that giving an 8 year old a ring might send the wrong message about roles in the relationship and discouraged the idea. However, we were very pleased to see that the relationship was that strong and suggested some of the other ideas which are discussed in this article.

Singing: Has God blessed your child with a musical talent? If so, they could sing a song during the wedding. Maybe at the time the Unity Candle is lit or at some other significant point in the ceremony.

The main point is to make sure the children are not neglected. That time is taken to explain to them what is happening, how the new household will function and allowing them to be an important part of the wedding ceremony.

I always remind couples that a marriage not only unites the two individuals; it unites two families and that is even more so when children are involved. This is a big day for you but it is also a big day for the children as well. Include them in the ceremony and if age appropriate, in some of the planning. They may have better ideas than we adults do. If you would like to share them, I will post them on my web site and may even include them in a future article. If you are getting remarried and need advice or information on second marriages go to <http://www.gettingremarried.com> You are likely to get responses from several experts.

Good luck and Blessings to you.