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Wisdom for Co-Families

There is a need to be very sure that both you and your family have worked through the grief of ending your first marriage before you contemplate another, or over-reactions will create insurmountable mountains out of mole-hills. Ask others for their honest opinion as to where they think that you are in the grief / recovery process before you commit yourself to another relationship. They can often judge more objectively than you can. Have you made friends with your own company yet? And remember, if you marry a solo-parent, you marry their dependent children as well. If this is an unacceptable statement, then don't, or your attitude will eventually *tear your new spouse's loyalties apart*. The following considerations may be useful.

1. When you take on another's family, do it with *all* your heart, or don't do it at all. Ambivalent ("I knew this couldn't work", "don't trust them or they'll reject you") attitudes become self-fulfilling prophecies.
2. If your step-children don't trust you, they won't give you permission to parent them, and a divided house cannot stand. Earn their trust *before* you marry their parent, for they have the power to sabotage your new relationship, and will do so if they remain insecure or become vindictive.....
3. Don't try to be the step-children's parent, if they are still grieving for the loss of their parent. Simply offer to be their friend, until *they* adopt you. Power cannot be assumed, it must be loaned to you.
4. Parents must enter into the world of their stepchildren also, so that the children can learn to enjoy their new parents. In order to do this, you may need to repeatedly step outside of your comfort zone. Spend lots of time balancing expectations; spouse with spouse, parent with child, child with parent, child with child.....
5. Be open and up front with all the children about the reasons for the first marriage breakdown. Children can cope with.....
6. Bonding two families together is difficult, but rarely impossible if the commitment to make it work is strong enough to pay the price. 'Them' and 'us' can give way to 'we all' if there is no threat of favouritism. No parent can serve two loyalties, and no child can serve two parents who are operating out of differing agendas. Be careful not to
7. Don't expect the children to have better mental health than you have yourself. Keep working on yourself. Have you accepted responsibility for your moods? Do you own your own decisions or do you blame others? Can you negotiate or do you
8. There are serious and hidden (subconscious) dangers with teenage children. How will Father avoid perceiving sexually mature step-daughter as an available woman, rather than as a dependent? How will Mother avoid perceiving step-son as
9. Spend both quality and quantity time together. Take lots of time for fun and relaxation, especially in the first year. There is no alternative to the time and.....

10. If the old techniques don't get their co-operation, don't keep repeating them. Family times, contracts, personal times and reflection on what has been learnt are all vital in the retraining process. Counselling support
11. Scripture gives stability where there are very few firm guidelines, and it reprograms our minds towards self-sacrificial love, but nothing is more important or powerful than Mum and Dad making friends with their own unbearable feelings. E.g. feeling shut-out, ignored, or excluded.
12. New bonds often don't 'take' until all the debris have been cleared away from the previous ties. This includes guilt, anger, resentment, projections, echo's and bitter expectation.
13. Prenuptial's is not an expectation of failure, rather it can prevent suspicion before ever it gets started. Even if he or she does prove to be trustworthy, do you really want to hand-over your children's inheritance to this 'new' man or woman? How will your children feel about that in years to come?

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