

HomeFront

*This article comes from my blog at the [Homefront](#) magazine.



When my husband, Tim, and I married one year ago we'd thought, talked and read about the best way to go about "blending" our family: How we would discipline the kids; How we would divide up the chores; How we would show love to our new step kids. It was important to us to be prepared for what we knew was going to be a challenging endeavor – bringing two families together.

When Christmas rolled around things were going pretty well but we realized what we hadn't thought about was how we would "blend" our Elf On the Shelf elves, Todd and Elfie. I mean, they are elves and as we all know, naturally friendly and playful, but what if they didn't get along or worse their mischief levels were unequal? What if they didn't play nice together?

Blended family issues

Needless to say, just like our kids, they seemed to have worked it out – mostly on their own. Not that Tim and I didn't

carry out with all of our pre-wedding plans for blending our family, but we have found the most effective way we have influenced our kids has been through modeling to them good, God-guided behaviors and attitudes.

When you bring two families together under one roof there is going to be some difficulty. Our kids are with us half of their lives and the other half they are with their other parents. Modeling becomes one of the most effective tools in teaching them. Not lists, or discipline or lectures, but showing them God's love through our actions toward has proven to be the secret ingredient to healthy blended family. This is how we have approached modeling in our home:

Modeling Grace

We show the kids that it's okay to not be perfect. That through God's grace and faithfulness we are loved by Him and by our family members – no matter what. This is a powerful thing to learn for a child who has gone through a divorce. We love them and we're not going anywhere. We want them to be steeped in God's grace while they're at our house.

Modeling Fairness

We treat each child equally and set clear rules. Discipline is tough in a blended family house. Tim and I came into our marriage with our own ideas of how to discipline and what are our non-negotiable house rules. For instance, I'm more permissive with snacks and treats (I was okay with my kids having the occasional soda but that was a big "no-no" for Tim) than my husband. But to be fair, we set clear rules for all the kids to abide by. So by modeling fairness we simply apply the rules to each of our kids.

Modeling Respect

We never ever (never!) speak badly about our ex-spouses. Did I say "never?" Tim and I do not badmouth our kids' other parent. Further, we have told the kids that they can speak truthfully about their feelings toward their parents (including about

us), but disrespect is not allowed.

Modeling Patience

I firmly believe you can not teach patience to a child by telling them about it or through reward or punishments. Nope, trying to teach a kid to be patient is like trying to teach the moon to be square. We must show our kids through our own actions how we use self-control and react with gentleness. It's not always easy – as in hardly ever easy – but by being patient with our own kids and our step kids we are laying the foundation they need to learn patience themselves.

Our kids have faired pretty well using these simple guidelines. Our elves have seemed to have worked things out themselves, too! The first night they were together they engaged in what appeared to be an epic snowball fight on our kitchen table.