

## Aging Lifestyles: Second marriage a relative thing

*by Joe\_Volz*

One of the trickier quandaries posed by second marriages is relating with each other's grown children and grandchildren. In the first flush of the feelings aroused by falling in love, it's easy to think that everything will go smoothly. After all, we love each other so shouldn't our children and siblings love our new partner, too?

It doesn't always work out that way, as Jake and Betsy discovered not long after their marriage 10 years ago. Betsy's son, Alan, and his wife, Peggy, live in the same area and the families visit back and forth regularly.

One evening after dinner, Jake made the offhand comment that their children never seemed happy to see him. In fact, the youngest hid behind his mother whenever Jake came into sight - unlike Marc's children, who always ran up for a hug and kiss when he came in the door.

Peggy flew into hysterics, weeping and accusing Jake of saying that she was a poor parent and didn't know how to raise children properly. Her husband, usually an easy-going guy, was obligated to support her and angrily told Jake to get out of his house. It took several months before an uneasy peace was restored, and only after Jake humbled himself and apologized by letter.

A cardinal rule of relationships in second marriages is never criticize the parenting techniques of your spouse's adult children. In particular, don't ever compare one set of grandchildren with the other. That's like waving a red flag in front of a bull.

It's also unfair. No one has discovered the one definitive way to rear healthy, happy children. There are obstacles in the road and part of parenthood is figuring out how to handle them to the best of your ability.

Another problem is what happens when a husband isn't overjoyed by his wife's brothers and sisters. Here is a case in point. Jerry is an outgoing man who loves to laugh and discuss anything - the more controversial the

topic, the better he likes it. His wife's brother, Andre, is the exact opposite. He is a reserved man who abhors discussing personal thoughts and feelings. What counts as a discussion for Jerry is a torturous fight for Andre, who hates disagreements. Jerry often complains that he just can't get Andre to open up to him.

Well, guess what? It's never going to happen, no matter how much Jerry keeps trying. His wife points out that he runs the risk of antagonizing her brother.

Jerry is trying to moderate his behavior when he is with Andre, out of respect for his wife's feelings. She hates thinking that she must choose between her new husband and her brother.

There are a few other rules for compatibility between a new couple and their offspring's children and other relatives.

- Always treat the grandchildren the same. Don't give one grandchild an expensive toy and the other a coloring book and crayons. Adult children will compare and judge your love for them accordingly.

- Attend family celebrations and school events as evenhandedly as possible. We have a grandchild who loves acting, so we attend his plays. Another grandson is an expert diver. We try to watch him in action at diving meets.

- Don't compete with the other set of grandparents. Our counterpart grandmother is wealthy and generous with her time and finances. She's always buying the grandchildren gifts. We couldn't afford it even if we thought it was good for them.

- Keep in mind that it's your responsibility to create a relationship with young grandchildren. Start when they

are little and you just may start the groundwork for a lasting relationship of mutual benefit.

- Always be willing to take the initiative to repair misunderstandings. Someone has to do it or relationships would be in shreds. Though it can be difficult to make the first move, your spouse will bless you for it.

In the end, you might even discover you are a more compassionate, thoughtful person for making the effort to get along with someone you normally would avoid.

It's also a prime way to practice for those times when you and your new partner are upset or angry with each other.

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