

Vows to Your New Children --- It's Never Too Late

By Moe & Paige Becnel

When two people marry they exchange vows with each other, which are promises to each other that they will love, honor, help and uphold each other --- through ALL circumstances that life may bring.

Vows are important because they bring to light the seriousness of the marriage covenant that the two people are making with each other. They also express the depth of the love relationship that exists between the couple.

Why Make Vows To the Children?

Too often, spouses *underestimate* how much of a part the “new” (“step”) children will play in the new marriage, regardless of their age. A child or children who do not feel a part of the new marriage and family, or who are resistant to the new spouse or family, can create great turmoil in the weeks, months and years ahead.

In a child's defense, we need to realize that:

- The children were probably not asked (and likely did not choose) to be in this new relationship or family.
- Our spouse's children are *NOT extra baggage, along for the ride, or someone else's problem*. We need to see our spouse's children as though they were a vital part of our spouse, because they are. We cannot separate our spouse from their children.
- The children involved may still be hurting from a previous divorce, loss of a parent through death, missing their other natural parent, still hoping their natural parents would get back together, and/ or some other negative emotions or situations.

Here is the reality: Your spouse and their children were/ are “one” before you and your spouse vowed to become “one” in marriage. *Your vows with your spouse do not circumvent the relationship they have with their children.* Realize the fact that when you married your spouse, you really also married their children because they were already one. When you understand this relationship dynamic and begin to treat your new children with real acceptance, your marriage and family will grow.

Many spouses have tried to separate their spouse's children from their spouse --- by making their spouse choose between them and their natural children, or by causing a child or children feel unwelcome in the home. These marriage relationships suffer severely – and many fail.

Here is a solution: Instead of making your spouse have to periodically make an *unfair* choice between you and their children, ***you choose to be in covenant with their children.***

It's time to stop being a “step”-parent. Choose to love them. Choose to make them an integral part of your life. Just as you made vows to your spouse, make vows to your spouse's children!

Sharing vows with children will do these things for your marriage and family:

1. You will make the children feel “significant” – that they are a real part of your life and the new home, not just on the sideline. This is SO IMPORTANT to get all members of your family started off in the right mindset. The sooner you create the right atmosphere, the better.
2. The attention that you give them during the vows will let them know that they are important to you, and to your new family.
3. You will become more aware of their presence in your home, and of your responsibility toward them.
4. You will enhance the relationship between you and your spouse. When you embrace your spouse's children in this way, you embrace your spouse more completely.

Already Married? Do it anyway!

Maybe you and your spouse chose the out-of-town island wedding. Perhaps your children were too young when you married, or maybe you just did not think of including your children to this extent in your wedding. That's OK!

The good news is that it's not too late to share vows with your "new" children (stepchildren), and make them feel a vital part of your life!

Should Your Children Make Vows?

That depends on the children. If the children are showing signs of resistance, we suggest not. We believe that expecting a child to make vows to an adult, parent-figure that they did not choose to be a part of their life can put pressure on the child. We need to remember that the child did not request the marriage. *Let's let children be children, and let the adults take the responsibility for building the family.*

However, if the children are excited about the wedding and marriage, allowing the children to also make vows to the new parents would be acceptable.

You may want to ask the children their feelings about doing so, and not force them to do something they are uncomfortable with.

Need A Great Sample Vow?

Brian and Ashley VanDreumel, good friends of ours and members of our church, allowed us to print the following vows that they wrote and shared with each other's children on their wedding day. (We had the privilege of officiating the VanDreumel's wedding.) They each stooped down and looked the children straight in the eyes as they spoke these vows into their new children's lives.

Groom: " _____ (children's names) _____, I want you to know that I dearly love your mother. We have become very good friends over the weeks and months and we have learned to love each other. As you have so graciously shared this wonderful woman with me, so will I share the love I feel for her with you. Together, we will learn much more about each other. I promise also to be fair and to be honest, to be available for you as I am for your mom, and in due time, to earn your love, respect and true friendship. I will not attempt to replace anyone, but to make a place in your hearts that is for me alone. I will be father and friend, and I will cherish my life with all of you. On this day when I marry your mom, I marry you, and I promise to love and support you as my own."

Bride: " _____ (children's names) _____, I want you to know that I dearly love your father. We have become very good friends over the weeks and months and we have learned to love each other. As you have so graciously shared this wonderful man with me, so will I share the love I feel for him with both of you. Together, we will learn much more about each other. I promise also to be fair and to be honest, to be available for you as I am for your dad, and in due time, to earn your love, respect and true friendship. I will not attempt to replace anyone, but to make a place in your hearts that is for me alone. I will be mother and friend, and I will cherish my life with both of you. On this day when I marry your dad, I marry you, and I promise to love and support you as my own."

The bride and groom's children then responded to the following vows when read by the pastor:
(children' names), do you promise to love your mother and her new husband?

Children respond: "I do."

Do you promise to support their marriage and your new family?

Children respond: "I do."

Do you promise to accept the responsibility of being their children, and to encourage them, support them, and accept them just as our heavenly Father accepts us?

Children respond: "I do."

(children' names), do you promise to love your father and his new wife?

Children respond: "I do."

Do you promise to support their marriage and your new family?

Children respond: "I do."

Do you promise to accept the responsibility of being their children, and to encourage them, support them, and accept them just as our heavenly Father accepts us?

Children respond: "I do."

There were not many dry eyes in the wedding hall when they finished!

We hope that this helps you understand the great value that children's vows can play in laying a foundation to build your family upon.

Start planning how you will make sharing children's vows in your family a special event. Then watch the attitudes of all involved begin to change!

Special thanks to Brian and Ashley for letting us share their vows with the world!

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