

# You Discipline Yours, I'll Discipline Mine --- Why It Does Not Work

By Moe & Paige Becnel

We know of many stepfamilies (also termed new families or blended families) in which the natural parents continue to be in a single parent role in the stepfamily environment. In most new stepfamilies there is an effort made to share the role of parenting between the natural and new parents (stepparents) in the home. However, the stepparenting process is very frustrating. Children often perceive their new parent (stepparent) as an "outsider." You may have witnessed this by such statements as "you're not my Dad" or "I don't have to listen to you." All too often, the follow-up reaction by the new parent is harsh, which starts the new parent – new child (stepchild) relationship on a negative note. They begin disrespecting and resenting each other. The adverse reactions to initial disciplining of new children frequently cause the parents to retreat from that effort.

As a result, "you take care of and discipline your children, and I will take care of and discipline mine" has become a common statement in numerous blended families today. On the surface, it seems like a logical solution to a difficult situation. We felt that way in our home. But is it the right solution? No. It is a division in the family, and if it is not removed, it will build resentment and disrespect between the new parent and the child, as well as between the husband and wife.

Read the following scripture. Matthew 12:25 states, "*Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, 'every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand.'*"

We experienced the frustration, and felt the rejection and disrespect between new parent and new children caused by an inappropriate disciplining process. It truly divided our home and our marriage relationship.

Here are some typical family responses to the "you discipline yours" scenario that cause this mode of family operation to not work:

1. The natural role for the husband and wife in a home environment is to support the children in that family, including disciplining them. When that role is retracted, the parent will likely feel he or she has been denied that role. This can create a real "disconnect" in that person's heart toward their spouse, marriage and family.
2. The new children may sense a "victory" over the new parent, and the new parent and new children will never develop a loving relationship as long a competitive spirit exists between them.
3. Without words, the new children are really being taught that there is something wrong with their new parent, and that they do not have to listen to, or respect their new parent.
4. Having two separate ruling authorities and rules in a home is damaging to the home.
  - a) It will cause disunity in the home. God's order in the home is for husband and wife to work together as partners. When the husband and wife are not operating in one mind and purpose, it will cause the spouses and children to not want to connect to that family or to its members.
  - b) It will create resentment, disrespect and competition. When one child is allowed to do something that another is not, or when one child is punished more harshly than the other, it will likely cause the children to resent and compete with each other.
  - c) It will hinder the home from developing into a loving family environment. A peaceful loving family develops out of a flow of unconditional love among all family members. When there is a lack of love by any member of the new family, it creates stress in the home rather than peace.

So how do the parents in this new home environment approach the parenting and disciplining issue?

First, the natural parent MUST "demand" that their natural children honor and respect his or her new spouse. God's order for all families is that your relationship to God is #1, your relationship

to your spouse is #2 and your relationship to your natural and new children is #3. Your children perceive when they are a higher priority to you than your new spouse is, and they will use it to their benefit. If your children hold a higher place in your heart than your new spouse does, it will damage and possibly destroy your marriage. Your spouse will resent your children and you. Also, if your natural children are more dear to you than your new children, you are building walls within your family. The children will sense the favoritism in the home.

Secondly, love is required! Discipline is only effective when love covers the discipline. Here is a scripture that addresses the relation between love and discipline:

Hebrews 12: 6 reads, *"because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."*

Children know the difference between discipline from a loved one and discipline from someone who does not know, love or respect them --- you do, too.

Before discipline by a new parent can be effective, the new parent MUST love the children as his or her own. We believe the most effective way for this to happen is for the stepparent to realize that when they married their spouse, they also "married" their spouse's children. And just as they spent a lot of energy and time with that spouse to develop that love relationship, so they will need to spend a lot of quality time with their new children, while carefully guarding the relationship with his or her natural children. Be reminded that love is a choice, not a feeling. God still loves you when you have ignored Him or have not been obedient to Him. Avoid displays of "conditional" love, where you express love only when the child is obedient to you. That is not love; that is tolerance. Children, and all people, respond to true love, not tolerance.

Building a relationship does not happen overnight. You will not love your new children overnight, and your new children may not respond to your efforts at first. It will take time. It may take even longer than normal if resentment has set in between new parent and new child due to an earlier attempt to discipline without love. Do not give up trying to build that relationship with your new child, even when they do not respond. Eventually, everyone responds to and gravitates to those who truly love them.

- What are you building today?
- Are you building resentment?
- Are you building walls between you and your new children?
- Are you building your marriage?
- Do you build up your spouse?
- Do you build up all of the children in your home?
- Are you building love for those around you?
- Are you building your family into a loving safe-haven for all members?

Cherish the new family, and each person in it, that God has given you!

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