

## MYTHS AND REALITIES OF REMARRIAGE

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A helpful starting point both for ministers and remarrying couples is to examine and discuss the common myths and realities that surround remarriage.

### **Myth One: “Love is better the second time around.”**

When people have been married before, they understand what is involved. Remarriages involve people who are older, more mature, and more aware of what they need and want. Remarrying persons know themselves better, are capable of greater love and deeper commitments.

### **Reality One: “Love is different the second time around.”**

All the characteristics of persons entering remarriage that are described in the myth may be true, and yet, the remarried couple must contend with some other factors that will affect their married love. Death and divorce are both difficult to face, more easily ignored in a new relationship and often avoided by those outside the relationship. The previous losses and grief, however, are an integral part of the person coming into the new relationship. Society is biased in favor of the first marriage and nuclear family. The culture has not learned how to integrate stepfamilies who face the cultural belief that “step is less.”

**Discussion:** *Tell each other your story of previous marriage and loss. Listen in a supportive way. What are your hopes for the future? What are your concerns or fears?*

### **Myth Two: “The previous marriage ended with the divorce or death of the spouse.**

### **Reality Two: “Divorce and widowhood are relationships that continue outside the person and within the person.”**

Divorce is a continuing relationship between two persons, just as marriage is a relationship between two persons. If there are children of the original marriage, the contact and negotiation between the divorced spouses will need to be continuous. They will need to address the issues of visitation, custody, normal child-rearing expenses, unusual expenses for medical treatment or education, and discipline. There are times when the children will want or need parents at: school performances, graduations, weddings, baptisms, confirmations, and illnesses. The partnership and financial responsibility of parents go on, even after the marriage has terminated.

There are also continuing external relationships to deal with after one’s spouse dies. Maintaining the relationship with the dead spouse’s family, providing opportunities for one’s children to be in touch with the relatives from the deceased spouse’s family, making decisions about the objects a couple collected are all concerns. A person will experience memories, both good and bad, that have become part of one’s inner life. There is grieving that needs to be done about the termination of the previous relationship.

**Discussion:** *How will I/we continue to stay in touch with our children and in-laws? How can I support your relationship with your ex? How can I be supportive when you are sad or upset by previous losses?*

### **Myth Three: “I’m marrying you, not your family.”**

### **Reality Three: “Since I want to marry you, I will attempt to deal with all those who touch your life and I ask you to do the same for me.”**

When persons remarry, they enter a complex network of in-laws, former in-laws, former spouses, former spouses' spouses, etc. A remarried person experiences less control over his or her life and is involved in much more negotiation.

**Myth Four: “I love you, so I’ll love your children, and your children will love me.”**

**Reality Four: “I will be thrust into a relationship with your children and will need to work at developing it. I’ll do it for you and for them, but it will not be easy or automatic.”**

While a stepfamily may look like an original core family and it may develop into a group of people who have many of the same feelings as intact nuclear families, a stepfamily is different. In a stepfamily, at least two sets of family customs, styles, and values must be integrated. It also means that important outside persons and influences intrude powerfully into the stepfamily from time to time.

**Myth Five: “We will know how to act in this new marriage and family. After all, we have been married before, haven’t we?”**

**Reality Five: “Although a remarriage and a stepfamily have some continuities with the first marriage and the original family, they also have many discontinuities.”**

The reality is that if the stepfamily is to succeed, it will need to be more intentional. More discussion and planning will be needed for its success; it will not simply evolve. For a time, it will probably be less spontaneous than an intact family.

**Myth Six: We love each other so much that this is going to be easy. Love conquers all.”**

Even persons who have been scarred in previous unhappy love relationships often hold to the romantic myth that love conquers all. And, because we love each other so much, there will be no great difficulties in building our remarriage and stepfamily. \

**Reality Six: “Love is different the second time around. It may have depth and maturity that the first love did not have, but it will also include some grief.”**

When one enters a remarriage, one also enters into a relationship with a complex network of people, and this requires vast human relationship skills. In all likelihood, a person will not automatically fall in love with his or her new spouse’s children by a previous marriage, nor will the children be enthusiastic about getting a stepparent.

The new family unit will never be the same as the old, intact, nuclear family. Instead, it will be a new style family. The new family will have to learn new roles, customs, values, games, and recreation patterns. As issues are resolved and persons come to accept one another, the new family may grow to be a satisfactory arrangement to all.