

# Photo Illustration

## 2011 KSPA Regional Competition

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### Description

You are a staff member of Ad Astra High School's The Star. Your editor has asked you to create a photo illustration to go with the attached feature story.

### School Info

Name: Ad Astra High School  
Location: Aspera, Kansas  
Mascot: Box Turtles  
Enrollment: 850 (grades 9-12)  
School Colors: Green & Gold  
Yearbook: The Honeybee  
Newspaper: The Star

### Contest Info

This is a **carry-in** contest.

Please attach **your assigned contest number** in the upper right-hand corner on the back of your photo.

**Do not** put your name on the entry. If you do, your entry will be disqualified.

Students are not to request help or advice from anyone other than the KSPA Executive Director. All work must be that of the contestant.

### Assignment

Using the information provided in the attached story, design a photo illustration that is not wider than 8 inches and no taller than 10 inches. The photo illustration may be submitted in color or black and white, and should be printed on 8.5 x 11-inch paper.

You may begin with an original photograph or photographs and, using PhotoShop or other editing software, create an image that illustrates the main idea of the story. You may include text, but it is not required.

**You must include** a brief paragraph describing the effects applied to the photo and explaining how your photo illustration helps tell the story.



## **Blended families can cause problems; local psychotherapist offers help**

More American families experience divorce now than ever before in history. Because nearly 40 percent of marriages end in divorce and people remarry, children of divorced parents are forced to cope with a new blended family.

Dozens of Ad Astra students come from blended families. But they're not all "Brady Bunch" perfect.

The blended family is a very complicated situation to navigate for a parent who wants to create a happy home – both for their child and themselves. And it's just as difficult for the students.

"I can't believe how resentful I was when my mom first started dating this guy," said Topper Headon, a sophomore at AAHS. "But now that he's my stepfather, I'm starting to get to know him better, and I realize he's not the monster I thought he was. Still, he's not my dad."

Making the transition into a blended family can sometimes breed conflict and resentment – children may be uncomfortable with their new step-parent's disciplining techniques or they might fight incessantly with their new step-siblings. Other children may withdraw and turn inwards rejecting parents' help.

"My 'new' mom is a doctor and all, but I won't let her put a Band-Aid on me," said Mick Simon, a freshman. "That's something my real mom's supposed to do."

To offer support for blended families, Joe Strummer, an Aspera psychotherapist specializing in family care for over 15 years, offers seven tips to help newly blended families cope with the changes.

### **1. Be Patient**

Many parents want to see their children and step-children get along so much that the situation can become forced and unnatural. "The most important piece of advice I can give is to take things slowly," Strummer said. "Often parents are so anxious to make everything feel right or good that they push the kids together. If you're a kid in this family, understand that your parents want you to like each other. Find ways to get to know your siblings on neutral ground." However, if parents "plan too many joint activities or try to "pretend" like they are one big happy family, let them know you enjoy outings, but would like to work some things out on your own.

### **2. Make Sure You're Included in the Process**

If the other half of the family is moving into your home, make sure you, the child, have a voice regarding your bedroom. "If an 'original' parent suddenly says to their own child, 'you will be sharing your room with Susie every other weekend,' that can create a problem for the two kids right away," Strummer said. "Talk with your parents before making a decision on the living arrangements and listen to their opinion. Reassure them through your act of listening that you know they still love you as much as ever."

### **3. Organize a Fun House Tour**

How they would like to welcome your step-siblings into the home? Make sure to get their input and try some of their suggestions. "Have them help set things up," Strummer said. "That way they're buying into the whole process. The child who has lived in that house can help plan an intro day for the new children or a welcome event." You can plan a fun house tour and decorate the space. Afterwards, the whole blended family can go out and get ice cream or see a movie or other age appropriate activity.

#### **4. Keep The Connection Between Biological Family Strong**

When new family members are moving into the house, a child may feel like he/she is losing affection from the original parent. "It is imperative that the lines of communication are open so that the biological children of each parent feels that they still have their parent to speak to without having to share their thoughts with both parents -- new and old," Strummer said. A child wants to have access to a biological parent "without needing to share all with their step-parent."

#### **5. Integrate the Blended Family Appropriately**

Although a distinction is important between parent and step-parent, a blended family works best when both adults play an important role in all the children's lives. Don't expect your new step-parent to just leave you alone. "When appropriate, new parents should have a role in their step-children's lives such as going to school plays, picking up at school or an activity, helping with homework," Strummer said. Discipline on the other hand can be a sticky issue. "New parents should not be disciplining their new step-children when they start living together. This will not make for a smooth transition." Help your parents establish household rules that apply to everyone. Start this by organizing a fun evening with food and then hold a family meeting afterwards to go over all the household rules and chores. With a family meeting "everyone is up on all the household guidelines and there are no secrets, nobody gets special consideration."

#### **6. Offer Support to Children Living in Two Separate Households**

"Going back and forth for kids is always difficult, they ostensibly live in two houses and often have to deal with two sets of step-siblings," Strummer said. "Every effort should be made to ease this transition." In addition, "parents should talk to their kids the night before they leave for the other house, to ask them how they're feeling, if they need help packing anything or if anything is coming up in the next few days, that they may need to speak to them about. Often kids worry that they will be missing out on some fun that their step-siblings will be having while they're at their other parents house for the weekend. This is all a tricky balance and it's incumbent upon the parents to keep checking in with the kids to see how they're doing, don't assume all is fine. This is not a time for that! Living transitions can take a long time to master, parents have to be patient, think outside the box."

#### **7. Get Creative!**

Remember having a blended family can be fun, but if there are problems in the household, sometimes there can be some creative solutions such as "a suggestion box in the house or a time for the step-siblings to all get together," Strummer suggested. This provides children with a voice and a fun environment to get to know their new siblings better. There are many things that can be done to help ease the stress of such huge life transitions and nothing works better than a fun, creative solution that involves the whole family.

#### **Common Mistakes Parents Make**

- \* Parents can be overzealous to make all children "get along"
- \* Many parents immediately start disciplining each other's kids.
- \* Parents often underestimate the stress their children feel while switching houses.
- \* Parents will sometimes bring up an embarrassing subject in front of new siblings or new parents.
- \* Parents should avoid talking about their "ex" disparagingly in front of others.

How did you work with your blended family situation or are you surviving it right now? Please share your story with The Star Online at [aahsstar.com/communityofsurvivors](http://aahsstar.com/communityofsurvivors).