GREAT RELATIONS

THERAPY PACKAGE

THE BLENDED FAMILY



Content:

The Blended Family

Introduction 03

How to use the package 04

Individual Self-Reflection 1: Questions for Yourself 05

Conversation 1: The Curious, the Conflict-Ridden, and the Resourceful Conversation 06

Tip: Promise to Your Partner 07

Conversation 2: The Good Conversation with Your Child 08

Tip: Promise to Your Child 11

Conversation 3: With Your Child – A Conversation that Calms, Eliminates Guilt, and Takes Responsibility 12

Conversation 4: Being an Adult Outside of the Family 13

Conclusion 16

INTRODUCTION

The Blended Family

With the therapy package, you gain access to a selection of conversation exercises, reflection tools, fun activities, and games that you can offer your clients to use between your therapy sessions.

This will enable more effective therapy, allowing you to work more deeply because reflection will take place that supports your work and allows you to guide your client in exploring personal themes at varying paces.

In this way, you contribute to the client gaining a deeper understanding of their own challenges and opportunities when reflection time and dialogue are practiced between sessions.

Your client will have a felt experience that what succeeds in therapy with you can be transferred to succeed at home, even when you are not present.

This package includes:
The blended family package contains 4 conversation guides and a reflection exercise, aimed at anyone affected by the new family dynamic when the theme is a blended family. The purpose is to foster understanding and create openness to everyone's perspectives.



HOW TO USE THE PACKAGE

Get the most out of each therapy session

Read all the guides thoroughly first

All exercises, dialogue guides, and activities can be used as part of a therapy process. We recommend that, as a therapist, you review all parts of the package yourself to determine when each individual client is ready to take one or more exercises home. The exercises can be used in both individual and couples therapy but are not suitable for children or teenagers, nor for adults where mental disabilities or illnesses hinder normal functioning.

STEP 1

Provide the relevant guide to the client as homework. You can either send a screenshot of the digital version or download and print the entire therapist package or specific sections (e.g., set your printer to only print page 5). Review the exercise with the client to ensure it has been received, understood, and can be completed successfully.

1

STEP 2

2

The client completes the exercise at home during the time interval before the next session

STEP 3

In the next session, you will discuss the insights the client has gained.

3

INDIVIDUAL SELF-REFLECTION EXERCISE 1

Individual Self-Reflection: Questions for Yourself

Self-Reflection – When You Need to Take Leadership for Your Family

- Do I expect the same things from my current partner as I did from my ex? Is that reasonable?
- Have I recently asked my current partner how my child affects them?
- Have I recently asked about my partner's desires and needs?
- Am I avoiding difficult conversations? What might be the reason for this?
- What do I need to feel ready to engage in tough discussions?
- How can I show support for my partner in their relationship with my child while working toward creating a safe and harmonious blended family?
- How can I support my child in their relationship with my partner?
- What positive and developmental aspects do I see in our family?
- What do I need to completely stop doing?
- What new actions should I take?
- What should I continue doing exactly as I have been?
- How do I create space for myself in my interactions with my child and new partner within this new family dynamic?

CONVERSATION

The Curious, the Conflict-Ridden, and the Resourceful Conversation

Conversation with Your Partner – When You Need to Reassure and Show Your Commitment

This type of conversation can arise when your partner feels uneasy or uncertain about whether you like their child and if you're on the same page.

What do you think I do well with your child?

- Why?
- What does it mean to you to see me do that?
- What effect does it have on our shared life?

What would you like to see me do more of?

- Why?
- What effect would it have on you if you saw me doing that?

Would you like to hear what I think you do well in our family?

- (Explain why it is good and what effect it has on you when it happens.)

Would you be interested in hearing what I see us doing more of together?

- (Explain why and what effect it would have on the entire family.)

Would you like to discuss what we each dream of contributing to positive shared experiences in the near future?

The exercise continues on the next page: Tip! Promise to Your Partner

CONVERSATION 1

Tip! Promise to Your Partner

Let This Promise Inspire You as a Framework for What Your Partner Can Expect from You. How Could Your Own Promise Look?

- I respect that you are the parent and know your child best: their needs and personality.
- I will honor your time alone with your child.
- I will not try to be an additional parent; instead, I will focus on building trust, friendship, and being a resource for your child.
- If something feels overstepping to me, I will provide constructive suggestions so we can consider and find solutions together.
- If something is emotionally frustrating, I will seek outside support so that I don’t direct criticism towards you.
- I will show you empathy, take time to understand your perspective, and be a resource for you—I hope to receive the same from you.
- I will work towards creating a sense of community within this family.

CONVERSATION 2

The Good Conversation with Your Child

When You Need to Talk About Difficult Emotions with Your Child

Your child might believe that an open, honest, and genuine dialogue with you about their feelings could hurt you. This fear may lead them to worry about losing you. It can be painful for a child to embrace the vulnerability of initiating such a conversation.

Therefore, it is your role and responsibility as a parent to guide a vulnerable conversation with your child, aiming for openness, honesty, and authenticity without your child fearing rejection. Even if you have always had a close relationship, the disruption of family life and the creation of a new one can make your child fear losing you.

Be careful not to promise something you can't keep; instead, simply say that you will remember what your child shares. It's more effective to repeat what you hear your child saying. This can be comforting for them (and also for your adult child).

Make sure to ask neutral, non-judgmental questions, and calmly inquire about what you don't understand.

Praise your child for showing vulnerability, which is the same as being open, honest, and genuine—especially when your child has a different experience than your own.

Focus on avoiding discussions about your opinions and feelings; instead, concentrate on understanding your child and being curious about what they have to share.

The exercise continues on the next page - The Good Conversation...

CONVERSATION 2

The Good Conversation with Your Child

When You Need to Create a Safe Space for Your Child's Difficult Emotions

It’s important to reassure your child that you can handle hearing exactly how they feel about the situation.

The insights you gain from these conversations should be revisited regularly to check in on any developments or ongoing feelings. This will help you know how to respond and show understanding as you support your child through life in a blended family.

If your child lacks the words to express themselves or seems hesitant, you can try articulating what you think might be going on and check in with them to see if it feels right. Here’s an example:

Conversation with Your Child

- “If I think you get angry every time you see my new partner, is there any truth to that? Where in your body do you feel that anger?”
- “Okay, in your stomach. How does it feel? It’s not nice to have a stomachache—what do you do when that happens?”
- “So you go to your room—what can help you feel better again?”
- “Playing with your brother and laughing.”
- “That sounds wonderful—playing and laughing.”
- “Is there anything you think I can do when you have a stomachache?”
- “Yes, just sit close on the couch, just the two of us—that’s something I really like too.”

The exercise continues on the next page - The Good Conversation...

CONVERSATION 2

The Good Conversation with Your Child

When You Need to Create a Safe Space for Your Child's Difficult Emotions

- Can you remember a time when you didn’t have a stomachache? What happened then? Okay, I spent some time cycling with you first—and then it wasn’t so bad?”

- Would you like me to do more things with you one-on-one? Alright, I’ll remember that: we should do more things together, just the two of us.”

- How does it feel for you when you see me kiss my partner? So that’s not nice—what would you like me to do when I’m with my partner? “Okay, you’d prefer that I just held hands and waited until we were alone to kiss? I’ll think about what you said.”

- How was it for you to tell me how you feel? So it was actually pretty nice?”

- What did you especially like that I did just now? That I didn’t scold you, even though you told me there’s something you don’t like to see?

- I really appreciate everything you shared with me—even about the kissing and the stomachache. I’m so glad to know that. Understanding how you feel helps me take good care of you and remember what’s important to you. You’re really brave. I love you so much, and you mean everything to me.

The exercise continues on the next page...

CONVERSATION 2

Tip: Promise to Your Child

Let This Promise Inspire You

Use this promise as a framework for what your child can expect from you, whether they are young or grown. What might your own promise look like?

You might think it goes without saying, but it is actually very important to verbally express to your child that they are significant to you, and that you will be there for them, even as you embark on a new relationship and start a new family.

Here's a suggestion for what you can repeatedly say to your child when they are reacting outwardly, inwardly, or showing signs of uncertainty:

My Promise to You Is:

- You are so important to me. You are something truly special, for you are my child.
- I will always be there for you.
- I will be with you when something hurts and when something makes you happy.
- It might feel difficult for you that I have made this choice. Even though I have chosen a new partner, I will never lose the bond between us—what we share together.
- I promise to continue being engaged in your life.
- You are not alone. I am here with you—in all that feels new.

Pay attention to the reactions that come from this promise: expressed in words, facial expressions, or body language.

CONVERSATION 3

Conversation: With Your Child – A Conversation that Calms, Eliminates Guilt, and Takes Responsibility

Responding to Your Child When You Cross a Boundary

It is common for parents, especially in the early years following a separation, to struggle with refraining from speaking negatively or critically about the other parent. Children often feel it is their role to soothe and take care of the parent expressing frustration over their ex, which can leave them feeling sad or angry.
However, it is never a child's responsibility to take care of a parent; it should always be the other way around. It becomes your responsibility to reassure your child and ensure they understand that they are not to blame for the separation or for any frustrations that may arise between you and the other parent.

If you find that you have inadvertently said something critical about your child's other parent, here are some responses you can use as inspiration:

- "I'm sorry that I spoke negatively about your dad/mom. It's not okay, especially knowing that you care about your mom/dad."

- "Even though some days are tough for me, I will manage through them."

- "I'm handling this situation, and it has nothing to do with you."

- "You don't need to worry about me. I'm here to take care of you."

- It makes me so happy to have you as my child."

CONVERSATION 4

Being an Adult Outside of the Family

Conversation Guide for Those Supporting a Child Struggling with Adult Decisions

You can help a child by being a listening, understanding, and neutral presence without overstepping the boundaries set by the adults regarding their family matters.

One of the most valuable ways you can assist is by providing space to normalize the difficult situation. Many of us can share our own experiences if we have faced similar circumstances or have been close to others who have. If you work closely with children or have personal experience with kids in the same age group, you will often be well-equipped to engage in a supportive conversation. This can help the child feel less alone in dealing with challenging emotions.

If you are uncertain about whether it's okay to approach the parents, ask them and explain why you wish to speak with their child. Parents experiencing guilt and shame may react strongly against another adult who seems to represent what they feel unable to achieve with their child. Show understanding for their pain while making your intentions clear and demonstrating helpfulness.

A child who directly reaches out or signals that they need help should feel that their outreach is welcomed. Trust that a kind, attentive, and neutral adult who can create safety and trust for a child can make a positive difference for the entire family.

Self-Reflection and Feedback

If you become uncertain about whether you are contributing positively in conversations with a child who is not yours, it can be helpful to write down what you think went well in the conversation and what you felt you could not resolve. Over time, you can identify patterns and choose the best approach for the specific child.

The exercise continues on the next page

CONVERSATION 4

Conversation: Being an Adult Outside of the Family

Conversation Guide for Those Supporting a Child Struggling with Adult Decisions

Attention Points:

- It's not about fixing the child's situation; it's about being available as someone who can listen and provide comfort.
- Avoid interfering in family dynamics, and do not pit children against parents.
- Listen rather than promise something you're uncertain you can deliver upon after further reflection.
- You alone are responsible for the conversation's development; you are the adult.
- Ensure that what is said in confidence remains between you and the child. (Your civic duty regarding authorities will come into play if you become aware of the child being subjected to neglect or abuse.)

Framework for the Conversation:
Depending on the situation, you can use this guide when you sense a moment of closeness that allows for an open, honest, and genuine conversation.

- Ask neutral questions that are non-judgmental, and avoid making value-laden reactions that might put the child in a loyalty conflict.
- Provide the child with the opportunity to express their feelings by asking neutral questions that can initiate conversations. Consider trying the following options:

The exercise continues on the next page →

CONVERSATION 4

Conversation: Being an Adult Outside of the Family

Conversation Guide for Those Supporting a Child Struggling with Adult Decisions

Talk about what you notice in the child:

- I can see that you're not as happy as you usually are when we meet. You look a bit sad.
- Is it because you have to get used to... ? (e.g., Dad has a new girlfriend)

Talk about how the changes affect the child:

- How does it feel for you that Dad's girlfriend's kids will be living with you and sharing a room with you?

Share your own experiences or those of others you know:

- I know a family/I have experienced that... what worked well was... (for example, that Dad and son went on trips together alone)

Talk about what the child wishes could be different in the new family:

- If you could be happy again, what would you wish for to be different?

Talk about what the child is succeeding at:

- When do you feel cozy and enjoy being with your new family?

Discuss the possibilities you see for the child:

- What can you come up with that could make you happy to be at Dad's?

The exercise continues on the next page

CONVERSATION 4

Conversation: Being an Adult Outside of the Family

Conversation Guide for Those Supporting a Child Struggling with Adult Decisions

During the Conversation

Avoid responding to the child with:
"I can understand that" or "That's really too bad."
It will be more soothing—and prevent your opinion from putting the child in a loyalty conflict—if you repeat the essence of what you heard.
For example: "So it makes you angry that your bonus sister gets to use your game console when you're at your dad's?"

Ask questions to better understand and allow for good pauses so the child isn't overwhelmed. Instead of rushing, come back to something the child said earlier and follow up on it:
"I've just been thinking about what you said before..."

Praise the child for expressing what is difficult.
"It's great that you're saying that out loud... It's so important to talk about what feels hard..."

Provide positive feedback when the child answers a question.
For example:
"It's smart of you to want to talk to your dad next time he drives you to practice, even though you're not sure if he'll get mad.
If it doesn't go as you hope, we can talk about what you can do next."

Show that you're listening by repeating the essence of what you heard the child say:
"You can trust that I hear you... so what you're saying is that it's hard for you that the new kids are rummaging through your drawers..."

Normalize the child's emotional reactions:
"It's completely normal to feel angry when it's hard for you to get used to them being in the house."

CONCLUSION

Good Luck!

Thank you for your interest in utilizing these communication guides from Great Relations, which we have created for you as a therapist to support your work with your clients. We wish you all the best in conveying them further.

We welcome your feedback, so feel free to share how you have used the package and whether it brings value to you and your clients. We also appreciate constructive criticism.

GREAT RELATIONS

