

# New kinds of family

o Metro and the British Council in Prague bring you lessons about the UK Culture o Today you will read about blended families

What is a family? What do you mean when you say 'my family'? Do you mean your immediate family – you, your husband or wife and your children? Do you mean your extended family – your parents and grandparents, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews... Or perhaps you mean something more complicated. Blended families are becoming more and more common.

So what is a blended family? These days, almost half of all marriages in Britain end in divorce and over 40% of marriages are re-marriages – people getting married for a second time (or third, or fourth!). More than 10% of all children in Britain live with one 'birth' parent and a step parent – a parent who isn't their biological mother or father. The traditional 'nuclear' family of two parents and their children is not so traditional any more. A 'blended' family can be a combination of parents, step parents, children, stepchildren, half-brothers and half sisters – a rich mixture bringing new possibilities and new challenges to family life.

Debbie's story. Debbie got married to Steve in 2001 and had two children, Lily and Alex. Unfortunately, Steve and Debbie's marriage didn't work out and they got divorced in 2006. The



Blended families also have their ups and downs.

children live with Debbie. In 2008, Debbie remarried. Her new husband, Martin, has three children from his

all sounds a little confusing but Debbie loves her blended family life. 'Steve and I had a 'good divorce', says Debbie, 'we tried very hard to make our marriage work but we realised it wasn't working – and then we did our best to make our separation as easy as possible for us and for our children. Steve lives very close to us and the children see him very often – in fact he sometimes babysits for us and he is looking forward to meeting the new baby'.

Ups and downs. It almost sounds too good to be true but Debbie and Martin are

quick to admit that blended families have their ups and downs. 'There are difficulties and challenges,' says Debbie. 'Different families have different routines and it can be difficult for children to move between their two families. Birthdays and holidays can be tricky. Where do the children go? Who should they spend their time with? Also, when my children are naughty it can be difficult for Martin to tell them off. Things that might be simple in a 'traditional' family can be a bit more complicated.' And how about the children? Martin's eldest child, Ella, is twelve. 'I like my two families,' she says. 'I live with my mum but visit my dad quite often and I like going to stay with my half brother and sister. I'm happy that my mum and dad get along OK. They're not married any more but it's good that they can still be friends.' Is her family unusual? 'I don't think so. A few of my friends at school have half brothers or sisters. I think it's normal, really.'

Making family life work. Of course divorce and separation are never easy but many people are finding less painful ways to do it and are changing the way that many people think about families.

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previous marriage. They live with their mother but they visit Debbie, Martin, Lily and Alex at weekends. In addition, Debbie is pregnant with her third child. She's expecting a boy who will be a halfbrother to Lily and Alex and also to Martin's three other children. It



Key



- be true.  
2 It sounds too good to be true.  
1 They have their ups and downs.  
Activity 4  
5 get married  
4 expecting a baby  
3 end in divorce  
2 have children  
1 get divorced  
Activity 3  
5 stepfather  
4 ex-husband  
3 husband  
2 step-sister  
1 divorced

Activities

Activity 1. Can you explain the differences between these pairs of words?

- ▶ 1 get married/ get divorced
- ▶ 2 marriage/ re-marriage
- ▶ 3 'birth' parent/ step-parent
- ▶ 4 'nuclear' family/ 'blended' family/ extended family
- ▶ 5 brother/ half-brother

Activity 2. Complete the sentences with a one of following word:

*divorced, ex-husband, husband, stepfather, step-sister*

- ▶ 1 Debbie got \_\_\_\_\_ from Steve in 2006.
- ▶ 2 Ella is Lily's \_\_\_\_\_.
- ▶ 3 Martin is Debbie's \_\_\_\_\_.
- ▶ 4 Steve is Debbie's \_\_\_\_\_.
- ▶ 5 Martin is Alex's \_\_\_\_\_.

Activity 3. Match the verbs with the endings to complete the expressions.

- ▶ 1 get \_\_\_\_\_ children
- ▶ 2 have \_\_\_\_\_ married
- ▶ 3 end in \_\_\_\_\_ divorced
- ▶ 4 expecting a \_\_\_\_\_ divorce
- ▶ 5 get \_\_\_\_\_ baby

Activity 4. What do you think these expressions mean?

- ▶ *It sounds too good to be true.*
- ▶ *They have their ups and downs.*

Which expression would you use in these situations?

- ▶ 1 Your sister and her husband love each other but sometimes argue.
- ▶ 2 You get an email that says 'Learn to speak English fluently in 2 weeks'.

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