

# EVERYTHING

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A PODCAST FOR BLENDED FAMILIES

- Summer: Hello, hello listeners. Oh my gosh, I'm so excited about today's interview, because it is awesome. Especially if you are a step-mom, you're just gonna have all those feelings of, "Yes, that's me. Finally somebody's saying it," all the things, it's so good and I'm just so excited for you to listen to it. Mike and I interview today Ashley Coleman. She's the content manager and writer for [Stepmomming.com](#), which is an incredible, awesome community for step-moms specifically. It's so great. If you're like Ashley, a childless step-momma, you're totally gonna get a ton out of this. But even people like me who are moms and then also a step-mom, so much, so much.
- Summer: And if you're on the other side, if you are the woman who is divorced and there is a woman who doesn't have a child that's now acting as step-mom in your children's life, you're gonna get a ton of insight out of this as well. So, there's so much good stuff. That's the goal with every episode. Let me quickly tell you a little bit about Ashley and then we'll jump into the interview. Mike does it with me, so there's a lot of good stuff, questions that he asks and we just kind of get down to the raw good stuff. But Ashley is a police wife, a step-mom to two beautiful step-daughters and they have a dog together. That's their joint baby, which is their German Shepherd, Dirk. And Ashley is also a certified life coach with her MED in educational leadership.
- Summer: She's in pursuit of her PhD in higher education, administration. During the day, she works in academic affairs in a large university in Virginia. And by night, she's doing [Stepmomming.com](#), which is delivering honest and humorous and so freaking spot on advice and encouragement for blended families. And she rocks it. And we'll talk about how she got into doing that as well. [Stepmomming](#) is such a fantastic community and we also have an interview coming up with the founder, and that story's really cool, too. You'll hear a little bit about it in the interview. But let's just jump right in and you get to hear all the goods. Enjoy.
- Summer: Ashley, thank you so much for talking to us today. I am so excited and I want to tell our listeners really quickly why I'm so excited, because you are the content manager of a community called [Stepmomming](#). I have never found such great articles and support, like you're speaking directly to me in so many of the things that you write about. I'm just like, "Hallelujah. Finally somebody's talking about this stuff." So, thank you and welcome.
- Ashley Coleman: Thank you for having me. I'm excited to be here.
- Summer: First if you just kind of want to tell us who you are and what made you start, get involved with this whole community and how long have you been doing it?

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Ashley Coleman: I am a step-mom of two girls. They are young. They're four and five. And I've been in the picture for four years, so I came in when they were just babies. We have them half the time. We have joint legal and shared physical custody with their mom, who we typically get along with well. We typically do pretty well with her, but it hasn't always been like that and I think that's a common story for a lot of step-moms out there for sure.

Summer: Yep.

Ashley Coleman: My husband's a police officer, which I think is an important part of our family dynamic and it kind of drives a lot of my thinking on a lot of blended family topics for sure. Our only, our baby as people call it in blended family world is our little German Shepherd puppy who's 10 months old.

Summer: Aw.

Ashley Coleman: Yeah. He's not a working dog. People ask that a lot. He's just a highly trained pet. That's what my husband calls him.

Mike: Nice.

Summer: That's awesome.

Mike: Yeah, those are great dogs.

Ashley Coleman: So, that's just the basics of my family. And then professionally I work in academic affairs at a university out here in Virginia and I am working on my PhD in higher education administration right now.

Mike: Very cool.

Ashley Coleman: My second career, really I guess my first career is in academic affairs.

Summer: How did you get involved with Stepmomming.com? How did that all come together?

Ashley Coleman: The blog used to be ran and the company was owned by both Kristen who's still the current owner and one of the co-founders and our step-daughters' mom. So, that's a really interesting story there and I know that's a story that she likes to share, so I will leave her to that. But that's when I found the blog, back when it was called Candy Apple Momma. I was originally drawn in because I was like, "Oh my gosh, this girl and her step-child's mom are running a blog together?"

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What is this craziness?" So, that was probably a year and a half ago is when I found that, and that was around the fall of 2017. I was just a follower. I just kept up with the blog.

Ashley Coleman: Three or four months later, I definitely was in the group and Kristen solicited kind of a call for group moderators. I was thinking, "Hmm, I might be able to give a little advice. I might be able to help out in a Facebook group." So, I kind of jumped in as a group moderator and started to really dive into the website and the content, and then realized that she accepted guest posts. So, I wrote something up, my first article on the blog which was about small parenting differences and about the importance of letting it go and the mental health freedom that you get from it. And I submitted that about a year ago and she accepted it and it was posted on the website. After I submitted a few after that, 'cause I got the itch, she finally was just like, "I need to bring you on as a staff member."

Ashley Coleman: So, her platform has just grown so much and she's just able to help so many people, so it was really just a blessing that she trusted me with her brand, really. So, I was officially brought on. My hire date was July 1st, so it's been nine, ten months now, I guess.

Summer: And it's awesome. Some of the articles here are like "My Biggest Second Wife Insecurity", which I mean, I have so many women hearing this who are the second wife are going, "Yes," raising their hand right now, just with the title. I mean, there's so many, "Help, my in-laws won't stop talking to the ex." I have totally heard that.

Mike: Holy crap, that's like our life.

Summer: No, I mean, I remember early days, those type issues. Or I love this one, "A girlfriend's guide to letting go. Let your man handle his business." Oh my gosh, so good. And really what I love, too, is just the point of view and the perspective that you have is so in line with what I'm thinking and I just learn a lot from it, so thank you guys for all that you're doing. I know that there's three main things that we're gonna cover today, so I'd love for you to kind of highlight what are those and then we'll dive right into them.

Ashley Coleman: It's important to know whenever I'm sharing my perspectives on these topics kind of what my wheelhouse is and who my target audience really is, because some of my perspective doesn't resonate with step-moms in different situations. I think it's important to note that I'm coming from the perspective of a childless step-mom. I'm also coming from the perspective of someone who

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came in when the kids were babies, and also from the perspective of someone who would never have biological kids. Those are three sensitive areas for a lot of step-moms and definitely play into my perspectives on the topics that we're gonna talk about today.

Summer: And I'm already thinking of, just in our group of friends, I already know some women that are like, "Yeah, I don't think I ever want to have kids," but they're with somebody who he does have children and there are the frustrations and things of, "What am I responsible for? What am I not? Should I be? Should I not?" There's so many of those things. "What am I supposed to handle? What should he handle?" So, I'm really happy to hear from your perspective. It's an important one.

Ashley Coleman: It's definitely a lot of unique facets to my situation and that's the case with everybody. I know that you have kids from a previous relationship and so does your husband, and you guys have four kids together. And your kids are a little bit older than my kids, so I love getting to talk to people with totally different situations and perspectives. I think that we learn so much from each other's stories. I think it's ...

Summer: Oh, yeah.

Mike: There's so many different dynamics of how blended families are constructed.

Ashley Coleman: Yes, absolutely. So, the three areas that I want to talk about tonight, first is how to cope with your second wife insecurities. The second is how to deal with the small parenting differences between your house and the other home.

Summer: Huge.

Ashley Coleman: The third, and this is probably my favorite, is letting the biological parents handle the big ticket parenting discussions and how that can really save your mental health and your relationship.

Summer: Yeah. Oh my gosh, these are so good. The first one with dealing with the insecurities of being a second wife.

Ashley Coleman: When I first became a step-mom, well I guess when I first started dating my now husband, when I was kind of a step-mom in training, there's so much heavy emotion that comes with it that you're just not prepared for, even though you know the person has kids. And I couldn't really put my finger on what my issue was in the beginning because I fell really naturally into a comfortable role with

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the kids. They were so young. They didn't really remember a time that their parents were together. I didn't have any backlash from them and they were just like little babies. So, that was easy for me, so I just didn't understand what my issue was. And then I finally figured it out. It probably took me, I don't know, it probably took me getting married to really figure out, "Oh my gosh, these are just huge second wife insecurities." And these are even relatable for people who maybe weren't ever married to the other parents of their kids, you know? But just that second figure of this level of importance in your partner's life is really something that really people should probably try to sort out in a premarital counseling before they get married.

Summer: That's so true.

Mike: Wise.

Ashley Coleman: The biggest thing with it is just the comparisons. You don't realize when you start dating a man with kids how many comparisons you're gonna make to them, to their previous life. So, anything from relationships with family members and acquaintances, and everybody who's known his ex for years and who has a relationship with her. Just because their divorce might have ended on bad terms doesn't mean that these people's relationships with her is on bad terms, you know? I remember thinking in the beginning that everyone who was affiliated with my now husband would just totally cut ties with her and now I know that that's so unrealistic. But that was one thing for sure.

Ashley Coleman: Think about wedding planning. That's kind of an obvious one, but how often do we in this second wife role, I mean what color was your bridesmaids dresses before? Oh, can't do that. Where was that? Can't have it there. Everything has to be so drastically different.

Summer: The date, yeah. Everything. It's so true.

Ashley Coleman: Yes. Like what season, all of that. And it's like, it's really funny coming from, and I hate to generalize, but coming from the female perspective on this, the stuff that's a big deal to me that my husband literally doesn't care about. I'm like, "What color were the bridesmaids dresses?" He's like, "I don't know." I was like, "What do you mean? We have to find out."

Mike: They had matching dresses?

Ashley Coleman: Yeah.

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- Summer: Or there's things like ... I remember times like this where I was like, "You've stayed at this hotel before with her? I don't want to stay here." You know, things like that.
- Ashley Coleman: Yeah. Anything. Like, "Oh my gosh, this orchestra's in town. I can't wait to go. Oh my gosh, you've been before? Well, now the whole experience is totally ruined." Like what? It's crazy. This wasn't even that long ago and it's so funny how even when you learn coping mechanisms for this that things still pop up, you know?
- Summer: Yeah. Triggers.
- Ashley Coleman: Buying a new SUV. All I could think about was not getting the same color as hers. You know, [crosstalk 00:12:53].
- Mike: That was the important feature of the vehicle.
- Ashley Coleman: Right. As someone who doesn't really care about all, I want the nice features, but I don't know the logistics of them. All I know is what they look like.
- Summer: But see, I'm so glad you're saying this, because this stuff is real. This is the real stuff that you're thinking about and you want to just say, "No, I'm just above all that and mature," but at the end of the day, we're human and those things do happen. And some times it's, like you said, you cope with it and after enough time goes by, those things aren't a big deal, but in the beginning, those little things, especially as women, it's like it's a big deal and it makes you uncomfortable and it's kind of like, "But why? Why?"
- Ashley Coleman: And then the biggest one for most step-moms is probably missing the first of having kids. So, this is really for childless step-moms. Missing out on that first experience having kids with him, that's just a huge one, and that lingers. And in my situation, my husband actually had a vasectomy in his first marriage. So, he's really done and he really doesn't want any more kids and he was really upfront with me about that. And it's funny because before him, I don't really know that I wanted kids, but then once the door's shut you're like, "Maybe I do want kids." Because we just, for some reason, play these little mind games and it's so silly. So, that's a big one for step-moms that I really like to talk about and talk through it with people because it's so important and it's so difficult to get through some times.

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Ashley Coleman: And it's something you can't label until you're kind of in it for a while and then you're like, "Oh, second wife insecurities." And you go to Google and people are looking it up. You're like, "Interesting. I'm not alone. This is great."

Summer: Yeah. And it is so interesting to hear that, too, because from my experience, I know there's ... you have that special connection with the person. You had children with somebody else, right? So there is, you did have that. But I also know that there is not that connection. Like with my ex husband, there is not that ... I don't know what the right word is, but it's just this ... sound horrible. And I don't mean this in a negative way, I just mean it's this person that I had children with that once upon a time there were feelings or there was something, so I think for me it's easier ... it was easier not to have that feeling of, "Oh, Mike, you had that experience with somebody else," 'cause I had it, too. Does that make sense? And it's so enlightening, though, to hear your perspective as somebody who hasn't had, didn't come in with children as well and having had that same experience. It's cool to hear that.

Mike: And super relevant for a lot of people.

Summer: So relevant, exactly. I'm so glad we're talking about this.

Ashley Coleman: When it comes to coping with them, I always think back to my husband's perspective and this would be like in the early couple of years whenever these things were really weighing on me. So, we got married after we had been dating for about a year and a half. So, probably the one to two year mark was my most insecure in this realm of second wife insecurities. And he used to, whenever I would overly vent to him as we tend to do, which is also not healthy, he would always say to me, "You think about her way more than I do."

Mike: That's funny.

Summer: That is funny.

Ashley Coleman: Yeah. And that's such a wake up call, too, you know? I'm like, "Whoa. I mean, you really don't, she texted you this today and you didn't have these 36 complex emotions about it? You just read the text and put the phone down? How did that work?" So yeah, and I think that that's a big eye opener. If our husbands aren't hung up on it, kind of like how you just described, you're not hung up on your ex. If he's not hung up on it, then why are we hung up on it?

Summer: Right, right. Exactly.

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Ashley Coleman: So, that's one part of it. And the second part of it is actually, this has been probably one of my biggest ways to cope is something that Kristen, from Stepmomming, says all the time and it's he wouldn't be the person you fell in love with today if he hadn't have been through that season of his life.

Summer: Yeah.

Ashley Coleman: I might not have even liked my husband if he hadn't have married her first and had these kids and had these life experiences, you know? 'Cause they change you so much and you grow so much from those experiences.

Summer: My cousin has always said, which is kind of cool, and I think she's had an up and down relationship but now they're all good, but with her husband's ex wife, and she always used to say to me, she's like, "I thank her so much, because whatever they had to go through made him who he is and made him the kind of man who's showing up to the relationship that he is," and I always think that, too, with Mike. It's like maybe something didn't work out well between the two of you, but some times I go, "Hey, whatever happened between me and my ex husband is making him show up the way he needs to for his wife now. Whatever happened with Mike and his ex wife, he's chosen to learn and do things however differently or whatever." You're now this perfect husband for me.

Mike: Isn't that really what life is all about?

Summer: Yeah.

Mike: It's learning and adapting, and being able to then deploy that information that you've gathered to be better. And through struggle you grow.

Summer: Yeah. That's such an important point to think of it that way, I think that's helpful for women in that situation, is to remember hey, this is part of his journey and what made him who he is for you.

Ashley Coleman: The takeaways about coping with second wife insecurities. And you know, I saw, you actually posted on your Instagram recently something about beware of the victim mindset, and that is just so true. I've actually written an article about the victim mindset before as well. And with all three of the things I'm talking about tonight, the whole theme is really like the power of perspective. We are so much more in control of our happiness and our blended family dynamics than we realize we are all the time. So, not struggling with the victim mindset and actually taking ownership of what's going on and the things that you can control

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makes the difference in everything, so especially when it comes to second wife insecurities, your perspective on it, it means everything.

Summer: Absolutely. Yeah.

Ashley Coleman: The next thing that is really important to me, because this is something that I really struggled with really, really terribly in the beginning is the small parenting differences between the two homes and how to just let that go. And why that is so important to let it go.

Summer: I so relate to this and I'm so glad we're talking about it 'cause I would say one of the biggest things I hear when my friends who are step-mom or with somebody who has kids, one of the things they vent about the most is the difference in the two homes. "Well, when they go over to her house, they can just do whatever." There's all this stuff going on. "And then they come here to our house and then there's all this transition time," and they're venting and that's like a big thing for them, because it is one of those things where you feel out of control because when they're not with you, you're kind of out of control of what's going on and you don't know what's going on. You're like, "Oh no, they're getting bad habits," or whatever it is. But I'm so glad we're gonna talk about this.

Ashley Coleman: And this is something that typically newer step-moms struggle the most with. And kind of like the second wife insecurities, it can pop back in and out as we go along the years, but we really learn how to deal with it and move forward more effectively as we get into it, but for me I know my first, oh my goodness, probably my first two years with my husband, this stuff just ate me up. Seeing the kids show up in clothes that were smaller than I thought they should be wearing or hearing that they went to bed at like 9:00 or something would literally just drive me up the wall. I wouldn't even be able to function. I would just be so blazing mad over the silly stuff, just like you said. This is something I hear people complain about all the time, all the time.

Ashley Coleman: "She won't give her a bath every night. She thinks that you should only wash their hair every other night." Stuff like that really-

Mike: Ashley, just wait until you're dealing with like device time and whether they can go to the movies without a parent there.

Ashley Coleman: Yeah. I tell you what, I am not ever gonna be prepared for preteen, teenage, adult step-momming, for sure.

Mike: Baby steps.

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Ashley Coleman: I can't. I can't even comprehend. And y'all have four in that age range. I don't even know how you're dealing.

Mike: We're tired all the time.

Summer: There's things you go through, and you know this, you go through times where you're like, "Oh, everything's kind of peaceful and good," and then there's times where it's like, "Ah," and you have a different opinion. There's times where I pretty ... I'm like, "But this is what I think," and then my ex husband will think something totally different and the same with Mike and his ex wife. It's like we might be a little stricter on something or a little more lenient or whatever it is. And it's just like, "Ah." It can drive you crazy, but then it's like ... even still, even though I think we've learned how to cope with these type things in a better way and go, "This is really silly to worry about, this really on the grand scheme of things is not such a big deal," but in the moment it feels that way, we still have those ... like you said earlier, some times they pop up and you're still triggered and it's still frustrating.

Summer: Hey guys, I just wanted to say thank you. Thank you for taking a chance on us and listening to our podcast. Our goal is for you to not only learn from us, but to learn with us. We've taken a leap on being pretty open about our blended family and how we do life and everything. We want to make sure we bring you all the things you want to hear, always. So please, if you have specific questions, like "How do I get along with my ex?", or "How do I get along with his ex?", or "How do I set some boundaries in place?", or "Why doesn't my step-son like me?", please, please email us with your questions. Email them to [info@summerfelix.com](mailto:info@summerfelix.com), because we want to answer those questions and we aim to bring you the best guests and conversations to address your most burning issues about everything, always.

Ashley Coleman: And I'll tell you an example of how things turned around for us was about two and a half years into things, my youngest step-daughter was three and she broke her arm at preschool. Prior to that time, things were very high conflict for us. We had just gone through, well they had just gone through a mediation to amend the custody agreement. There was a relationship that popped off and had broken off and the oldest had just started kindergarten and there was just a lot of complex emotions in the family dynamic. We were at a point where if we were trading the children and she was one minute late, my husband would call her, or things like that. We were just in a very tense time.

Ashley Coleman: And then my step-daughter broke her arm, which is the phone call you don't ever want to get about your child, and I don't know what happened, but we

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were in that doctor's office, from that point on, we have just been a totally different family. We knew right then we had to work together. We alternate on a 2-2-3 schedule. So, we do a lot of trades and it works well because that's my husband's work schedule, too. So, every time he's off, we have the kids. So, we knew she's gonna have to be out of school for a while, we're gonna have to transport medicine back and forth, we're gonna have to transport her sling back and forth and bathe her properly with the cast and this and that. I really hope that other families can get to this point without having a child break their arm, but having that big experience that really put things in perspective, I think for all three of us ... And I say three because there's no step-dad involved yet, but it really made all the difference for us.

Summer: Well, 'cause you guys kind of realized what the priority was. It was like, "Okay, let's put egos and all that kind of stuff aside. It's about the child."

Ashley Coleman: Yes. So, something that I tell people a lot just to remember about this is these small parenting differences, such as bed time and soda intake and clothing and stuff, they seem like a huge deal when you're in the moment. So, when people kind of vent to me about that, I validate them, because when you're in that season of step-momming, that is a huge deal to you.

Summer: Yes.

Ashley Coleman: I feel that. But then how I always try to turn it around is we forget how adaptable children are some times. A good example is the difference between school and home. They adapt to different sets of rules, different sets of principles. They know how to act one way at school and one way at home. They adapt the same way between two homes, so if the other parent at the other home lets your child stay up later than you want them to, your child's gonna be fine. It's not, it doesn't mean that they're gonna end up in prison one day. They're gonna be just fine. So, I really try to talk people off the ledge that way. It's another the power of perspective, you know? Once you realize that it's really gonna be okay, you can move forward appropriately.

Summer: I'm hoping this is loud enough for people to hear, like that they really get it, because it is so huge and I hate to say wastes a lot of time, because it's all a lesson. It's kind of, I think you had to go through that to actually look back and go, "Okay, maybe that really wasn't such a big deal." But I don't know, I think there's a reason that you go through that.

Mike: It's funny to me because a lot of the things that we're talking about are all things that we've dealt with.

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- Summer: We totally have, yeah.
- Mike: It was so prevalent years ago in terms of like, "Well, this is going on and we don't have consistent rules," and then finally we're just like, "You know what? We're just gonna have our rules."
- Summer: Yeah. We're gonna have our rules, you're gonna have your rules. But I remember getting all upset. "Oh my gosh, why are they drinking so much soda? They're too little for this. What's going on?" You do. You think of all that.
- Mike: Little things like we make our bed before we leave here, you don't make your bed ... Such small stuff in the big picture. Now of course, there's some bigger things. There's times where you have to have that, hopefully have that line of communication to say, "Hey, listen. In the best interest of little Johnny here, we need to communicate and be on the same page because we should have a common goal, and that common goal is to raise an amazing little human."
- Summer: Especially as they get older and you do have teenagers, and there's friends and there's a lot more things that are going on in middle school and high school. You definitely want to-
- Mike: Be on it.
- Summer: Be on it.
- Mike: It's something that comes up in a lot of our podcasts and the things that we do in terms of ego. If you can be mature enough to let go of the things that are those driving forces, you'll make decisions that are better for your kids.
- Summer: Yeah, that's a great point.
- Ashley Coleman: This is just another instance where empathy really goes a long way.
- Summer: Oh, yeah.
- Ashley Coleman: I mean, it takes a while as a new childless step-mom to really empathize with the biological mom.
- Summer: That is tough. And I agree with you, but I know that this is tough for women. I'd love to hear how you got to that point.

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Ashley Coleman: It's funny because I definitely always thought that I was good at empathizing with her. Her and I directly were never had conflict, her and my husband had a rocky divorce and they certainly were tense, but for a long time me and her didn't even really talk much directly. And then we really started communicating at the time that my step-daughter broke her arm. And from that point forward, we've talked a lot. We've actually, we do girls dates with the kids and stuff like that, so we've really come a long way.

Summer: Oh, wow. That's awesome.

Ashley Coleman: But I remember in the beginning, I definitely thought I was just nailing it. And I really thought that I understood where she was coming from but that she was just wrong. You know?

Mike: I understand you, but you're wrong.

Summer: I really empathize with you, but you're wrong. Yes, I get that.

Mike: That's awesome.

Ashley Coleman: Time heals a lot in these co-parenting relationships.

Summer: Oh, yeah.

Ashley Coleman: So, just the natural, organic growth that we all went through. And then when we just started talking about little random things, I think that that helped me see her as human, which I thought I was doing. I really did. I never had any malicious goals towards her or anything, but once we started to open up to each other, basically I never tried to force myself on her. I think that that's really unhealthy. I really cringe whenever I hear step-moms say something along the lines of, "I'm gonna write a letter to my step-child's mom and extend an olive branch," or better yet when they say, "I'm gonna give her the ultimatum. Either she accepts me or I'm out." That is really stressful to me.

Summer: I would advise against that.

Ashley Coleman: Yeah. And it happens all the time, and I really think that the biological parent needs to bring in the step-parent in whatever direction, at their own pace. So, I never tried to force myself on her or anything, so we kind of started chit-chatting and getting to know each other on a really casual level. And then one day, I think that I actually went to her house to help out when the arm was broken, she needed help. She just suddenly kind of spilled her guts to me about

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how she really wants us to work well together and how thankful she was for me, and she called us co-moms at one point, which is words I never thought I'd hear.

Summer: Yeah.

Ashley Coleman: To me, a step-mom is a totally different role than mom. Part of what we're trying to do at Stepmomming is actually break the stigma around the word step-mom and step-dad.

Summer: Yes. Oh my gosh, yes. Because everybody tries to come up with these different terms and I'm like, "Why does it have to be a bad term? Because of Cinderella? Why?"

Ashley Coleman: Absolutely. And it's so, and I get it, it's all society and history. But I really try to take pride in my title as a step-mom. I try to wear it with pride. I don't think that it means I'm any less of an impact in the kids' lives, I'm just in a different role and I think that's totally fine. But yeah, that's how I started to really gain empathy with her was I just took it slow. I never forced myself on her. We got to a point where we did some casual chit-chats and then finally we kind of had like an opening up conversation and from then on, we've been really good.

Summer: And you know what's so nice is that it's happening when the kids are young.

Ashley Coleman: And the girls love that we get along. She always gets them on Mother's Day, obviously, even if it's not scheduled to be our weekend, and last year she actually invited me to spend Mother's Day with them and the kids just loved that. So, they love stuff like that and I think that that's really beneficial for them long term.

Mike: That'll be healthy, too.

Summer: So healthy for them.

Mike: It's cool that you have that, 'cause a lot of people don't have that.

Ashley Coleman: Yeah. Oh, and it's probably, this is kind of off script, but it's important for people to know that you can do things like that. You can get along with your step-child's mom and you can spend time with her, and that doesn't mean that you're best friends with her. And that also doesn't mean that you interject yourself into big parenting discussions, which I guess is kind of a segue to my last point. And another thing that I do is whenever her and my husband are at a tense time, we kind of back off communication with one another, you know what I mean? A lot

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of people hear, "Oh, you hung out with your step-children and their mom. Wow, y'all must be best friends. It must be all sunshine and roses," and that's just simply not the case. We have our ebbs and flows of co-parenting versus parallel parenting just like all other families do.

Summer: But you have boundaries in place, it sounds like.

Mike: And you're putting the kids first.

Summer: And at the same time, also what I was gonna say is the priority, too, is having your husband's back, so that makes sense. It's like it would be, if they're having a tense time, for you to then be like, "Okay, well she and I are gonna go get coffee," that would just be kind of like, well ... And I think that's so smart, because you just basically eliminate as much as possible, like any further tension or drama that could happen by doing that. So, I think that's so smart to hear and I'm glad that you clarified that, because I think some people listening would be like, "I don't want to be her best friend," or "That's awkward" or "How do you ... that's so strange."

Summer: There's an expression I will say, too, is that you can be friendly with somebody, it doesn't mean that you are best friends. You be friendly, though, but you can talk and have conversation and at the end of the day, you guys, the goal is, the common ground that you have is let's raise these children and be there for them and let them feel like they have this whole team surrounding them.

Ashley Coleman: Yes, absolutely.

Summer: It totally goes into the next point, which is so important because there's definitely that pressure for step-parents. I've actually been told this before by other people that are like, "You are another parent for them, so you should be doing this and you should be handling that, and why don't you step up and handle this situation?" And I'm like, "Well, I might love them like my children, but at the end of the day they have a mom and dad. I'm step-mom, I have a different role," and I'm with you on that they're being ... it's distinctly different than the biological mother. But it's interesting to me that I've had people say that and then it made me question, this is like years ago where I would question and go, "Does that mean I'm not a great step-mom because I'm not taking on that role? This is very confusing," but it never felt right to me. I was like, "That's not my job." I'm excited for you to dive into this.

Ashley Coleman: Yeah. This is so important and it's really difficult. Once you've gotten yourself into this hole, it's really hard to dig yourself back out of this hole. But I think

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most of us get ourselves into this hole, so it's definitely important to talk about, and that is letting the biological parents really handle these big ticket parenting discussions. Just like you said, a lot of criticism comes with saying that some times in some forums, but hopefully I can help explain, we can help explain why it's important.

Ashley Coleman: It comes in two different ways. So, the first way is some step-moms or more commonly future step-moms, I'm talking long term girlfriends, live in girlfriends, or maybe newlyweds, fully take over communication with the biological mom, for a lot of reasons. And when you ask them about it, they always have a justification. So, the justifications could be, "Well, I communicate more calmly with her, so I am actually avoiding conflict this way by doing this."

Summer: By the way, raising him, we've been guilty of that going, "Well, maybe you should just communicate instead of, since she and I always seem to fight. Maybe it should just be ... " That's pressure, too, right?

Ashley Coleman: Yeah.

Mike: [inaudible 00:35:13]

Summer: As you were talking about it, we looked at each other, we're like, "Yep." And that's the whole purpose of us doing this. We've done some things that have worked really well and some things were like, "How could we think that would work?"

Ashley Coleman: Yeah. And some things definitely work seasonally. And just like with everything in life, nothing is one size fits all. What I'm saying might not work for everybody, but I really believe in my heart that it works for most people. The step-moms that totally take over communication, because it's gonna be more peaceful or, this was my go to, because I knew more factual evidence than my husband, you know what I mean? Like I remember what was said better or I remember these emails that were sent better, or whatever. There's always a justification for it. The reason that it's an issue is because these step-moms who are doing this then turn around and talk about how overwhelmed they are, how much anxiety they're feeling over this situation, how unappreciated they feel, right?

Summer: Oh, yeah.

Ashley Coleman: So, there's that. That's one example of this. But the other, and I think this is probably more common, is these step-moms who they're not directly communicating with the mom, but they are, because they're the ones sending

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every email from their husband's account, they're proofreading every text before he sends it, they're demanding a recap of every phone call that happens. They come home from work and they're like, "Did you talk to her today? What'd you guys talk about?" And then, "Oh, did you say this to her? Oh, you should've said this to her. Oh, I can't believe you didn't bring this up to her," stuff like that.

Ashley Coleman: It's exhausting. And I've been here and I was on the second part of that before. There was a point in time where I admittedly was very involved in the email process. I don't know why I was doing it to be honest with you ... Well, I really do, and it's because just like so many of us, I just wasn't giving my husband enough credit. I just knew I could craft a better email. So, why wouldn't I? Or whatever.

Mike: Well, you are a pretty talented writer.

Ashley Coleman: Thank you. Yeah.

Mike: This is quite possibly true.

Summer: Are you sure you aren't the exception to the rule? No, I'm just kidding. No, I've been there. I've totally done that. Maybe can I ... why don't I just say it a little bit nicer, you know?

Ashley Coleman: Yeah. It's something you build up to and it's so innocent at first. It starts with he has you proofread one email and then the next time, "Oh, well let me just change a little bit here," and then the next time, "Let me just add here." And then the next time you're just totally on his email. And then you're saving things as a draft and you're like, "Hey, read this and send it." And it's really like take a step back. So, let me just say again for anybody listening, if you're listening to this and you are a step-mom and you do all the communicating with your step-child's mom and it is not a stressful experience for you and it is not causing any issues in the step-family dynamic, this message is not for you. You are fine. This is not one size fits all.

Ashley Coleman: This is really directed at these step-moms who are simply doing it for control and then it's totally driving them crazy mentally. They're exhausted, they're overwhelmed, they're anxiety-ridden. This is who I'm speaking to right now. Like I said before, it's hard to dig yourself out of this hole once you've been here, but let your man handle his business. Seriously. He is so much more capable than you think he is of handling his business. And even if your justification is that you communicate with her more calmly than he would, it's not your problem. These two adults chose to have kids together. Or they chose to have unprotected sex

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together. Or whatever the case is, you know? They made their decision and they have to man up and work together for the sake of their children.

Summer: Exactly. It's their responsibility. I actually wrote a post about this maybe a week or so ago. But it was kind of the same thing. It was like he was okay, he was okay before you, you know what I mean? In terms of-

Ashley Coleman: Yes.

Summer: ... dealing with the kids and handling these things. He's okay after. And whether it's you're trying to be in control or like for me it was like a guilt thing like, "Should I be doing more? Should I be doing more?" It was finally like, let me just lay the heck back. It's mostly my responsibility to be present, role model, all of that. I want to be all of those things, but it's really like I want to be in this relationship with him and make our relationship strong. And like you're saying, if you're doing all of that other stuff, you're just robbing energy from what you could be giving to your relationship.

Ashley Coleman: It's so important to show them a strong marriage.

Summer: Yes.

Ashley Coleman: Because they've already seen a failed marriage, you know? So, they're really relying on us to show them, to step up and to be there for one another and to show them a strong marriage, for sure.

Summer: I have seen two step-moms and you might know this, too, it's like a thankless job. You don't have kids going, "Hey, thanks for running me around and going all this stuff for me." You're not gonna hear that. And nobody really knows how much you're putting in besides you. But at the same time, for women listening, too, don't be a martyr, you know what I mean?

Ashley Coleman: Right. And maybe you can speak to this, because I always say this, but I don't really know, because I'm not a mom, but to me being a mom is a thankless job, too.

Summer: Oh, it is. Totally. Totally.

Ashley Coleman: As a childless step-mom, we want to be taken so seriously and we want people to know that we are parents and we are just like a mom or whatever the case is, but then we're like, "Oh, well we don't get any recognition and the mom gets all the recognition," like no, she really doesn't, either.

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Summer: Yeah. Going back to that whole victim thing, too, and it's like hey, just remember step-mom, mom, dad, all of you, everywhere, you're in this situation because you all made choices to be there, you know? You might not have liked a choice that you made to end up there, but you are there.

Mike: Take responsibility.

Summer: You gotta take responsibility. So, that's another thing. It's like, "Well, I have to do this," or "I have to deal with his ex or whatever." It's like, but you chose to be married to him and you knew that that was part of the package, you know?

Ashley Coleman: And also I think it's important for people to know that, 'cause a lot of times when I suggest that people kind of take a step back from communicating, they really don't interpret that properly. And what I'm saying is you can still be totally active and present, and an equal parent in your household. I'm very active. I would say my husband and I parent just as if the kids are ours when they're within our home, you know? And we divide things up equally just how other families probably all do, and people always say, "Oh, but you're a parent because you're a step-mom, so your opinion matters," and that's so true, it's my responsibility along with my husband's responsibility to make sure that me and him have important communication prior to him trying to make a big decision with the mom.

Summer: Yes. Exactly.

Ashley Coleman: My opinion is heard through my husband's communications with her. And every now and then it doesn't work out in your favor. Like every now and then, they'll decide on something. They'll sign him up for an extracurricular for example that you're like, "I didn't really want this and now we're gonna have a four night a week soccer commitment," or whatever.

Summer: Right.

Ashley Coleman: And I'm gonna have to pick him up all the time. Thanks for not ... But at the end of the day, that's another small thing that big picture really doesn't matter, because getting them into these things will make a long term impact on them for sure.

Summer: Yes. Oh my gosh, that is so true. Oh, there's so much good stuff in today's interview. I love it.

Mike: Yeah. This is good.

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Summer: It's like there's so much I relate to, there's so much good advice. And even though I know you're childless step-mom, but still just I am relating to so much and getting so much out of it, and I do have children. So, I love it. I'm so grateful to you.

Ashley Coleman: That's awesome. Thank you. I never know how some of my perspectives resonate with step-moms who have kids, honestly, 'cause you just never know. So, that's nice to hear for sure.

Summer: You don't know, but it's so good to hear. The thing is is like the more empathy that we can have for all of these different roles that we play, the better.

Ashley Coleman: Yes, absolutely.

Summer: And you only get that from hearing the stories and really understanding. I'm really looking forward to the interview with Kristen to hear about the story of how Stepmomming initially started. That's gonna be so cool.

Ashley Coleman: Yes, yes. And she's awesome, and she is so wise and offers such great perspective, so y'all are gonna have such a fun time.

Summer: I want to let our listeners know where to go. So, it's Stepmomming, in case you can't hear. It's Stepmomming, I-N-G. And we'll have a link to it as well, and we'll have a link to you as well, Ashley, and all of your amazing, amazing articles. I can just keep going and going. You're so talented and just so honest and real, and that's what's so exciting for me, 'cause I don't really know. One of the biggest reasons that we started this is that I was like, "There's not a ton of stuff out there that I feel like people are being real and honest." It's more just like, "Here's what to do. Here's what not to do." And I want to hear the real stuff like we talked about today. Here are the real kind of icky, ugly feelings that you have and deal with. Or here's some of the behavior that you do that you're not proud of, but here's how you overcome it. And I think it needs to be talked about more, so I'm just, I'm so excited about your community and all of the insight that you guys offer.

Ashley Coleman: Yeah, thank you. And final thought, just to reiterate, ladies, you have so much more power over your happiness than you realize you do. So, in all instances, well and gentlemen, everybody. Everybody listening, it's well within our control to take a breath and to be happy, and to be ... to understand how blessed we are to be living the lives that we're living.

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Summer: That is so true. And just owning those things and those feelings, and owning where you're at, that's control right there. And if you suddenly feel, it makes you feel happy when you are like, "I'm in control of my life," and that's how you get to be there, by not blaming others or that victim mindset.

Ashley Coleman: Yes. Absolutely.

Mike: This has been a fun episode of the Everything Always podcast.

Summer: I saw a lot of chuckles from Mike, he's like-

Mike: I'm just sitting here smiling.

Summer: He keeps nudging me going, "Yep, yep." It's awesome. I love it.

Mike: "Here, proofread this. Here." Summer's, "Here, take this. Make sure it's good and send it."

Summer: Love it.

Ashley Coleman: Y'all are so fun. It's been so fun talking to you.

Summer: It has been so much.

Mike: This is great. We definitely gotta talk again.

Summer: Yes, definitely. Thank you so much. Keep doing all the awesome stuff. Those kids are so lucky to have you.

Ashley Coleman: Oh, thank you.

Summer: All right. Until next time.

Ashley Coleman: Thank you.

Mike: Hey, guys. Thanks so much for listening to our podcast. You know what they say, if you can't find what you're looking for, then you need to create it. So, that's what we did.

Summer: Yep. I scoured the Internet and looked for the tribe that spoke to me and I just couldn't find the community that was raw, vulnerable, and really wanted to

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make a change to the millions of families like ours. So, I decided to create it. It took about one conversation for my husband to say, "I'm in," and here we are.

Mike: But it takes listeners like you to keep it alive.

Summer: So please, if you like this, write a review, take a screenshot, share it on your social media. Tell people. It means the world to us.

Mike: Remember to email us. We would love to hear from you.

Summer: And please share this with someone you love.

Mike: And be bold enough to share it with someone that you don't.