THE OFFICIANT'S CUT

The Blended Family *Unity Ceremony.*

The sand ritual that includes the kids, the words to say over it, the step-parent vow, and the one conversation to have before you plan any of it.

AS SEEN IN

Tamron Hall · *Brides* · *The Knot*

FROM ROBYN'S DESK

A family, *taking shape.*

This is the blended family unity ritual the way I read it at the altar, set in large type so whoever is officiating can read it at arm's length.

A wedding can quietly center two adults while the kids sit in the second row feeling like guests at their own family's beginning. This moment reverses that. It puts the children in the picture, by name, in front of everyone who loves them.

In the margins are the cues I have learned over 300+ ceremonies: when to invite the kids forward, what to say if one freezes, where to let the pour be slow. The script deliberately trades permanence language for creation language. You will see why on the page about the line I cut.

Read it once out loud, in your own voice. Then have the conversation on the first page after this one. That conversation matters more than any words you say at the altar.

Robyn

ROBYN ASHLEY WEDDINGS · BROOKLYN · NYC

Ask the kids *first.*

DO THIS BEFORE YOU ORDER THE SAND

Not a legal step. The one step that decides whether the whole moment works.

Before a ritual is chosen, the couple sits down with each child, one at a time, and asks whether they want a part in the ceremony at all. Asking is not announcing, and a kid feels the difference the second you open your mouth.

Give them real options, including doing nothing. *"Would you like to pour a color, or hand me the sand, or just sit in the special seat up front?"* A child who picks the seat is still taking part. They chose their level.

— *[One child at a time, never as a group. Siblings perform for each other, and a shy kid will fake enthusiasm to match a bold one.]*

ROBYN'S NOTE

Settle a backup before the day. If a kid who said yes freezes at the altar, I say *"and we are so glad you are here with us"* and move on. No pause, no spotlight, nobody but us knows there was a plan.

What you'll *need.*

- ***One clear vase*** with a lid or stopper, sized so the colors fill it without a gap at the top.
- ***A pouring vessel for each person.*** The couple plus one per child. Small enough for a kid's hand.
- ***Colored sand.*** Two colors for the couple, and a color each child chooses for themselves.
- ***A small side table*** set off to one side, not dead center, so the couple is still the picture.
- ***A front-row seat of honor*** for each child to return to after their pour.

— *[Place the table within easy reach of the altar so nobody has to walk far mid-ceremony. Pre-fill each vessel and line them up in pouring order.]*

ROBYN'S NOTE

Let each child pick their own color a week out. The kid who chose teal because it is their color pours with a little more pride than the kid handed whatever was in the kit.

A wedding, *and more.*

— *[Place this after the ring exchange, just before the pronouncement. Turn toward the gathered family.]*

A wedding joins two people. This one does more than that. Today we are watching a family take shape, and that includes the people who matter most to **[PARTNER 1]** and **[PARTNER 2]**: their children, **[CHILD NAMES]**.

— *[Invite the children forward by name. Wait. Let them come at their own pace. They stand beside the couple, facing in, for this part only.]*

ROBYN'S NOTE

Decide ahead who cues the youngest up, usually me with a small nod, or a grandparent in the front row who walks them. A four-year-old needs a hand, not a stage direction.

Every color *belongs.*

Each of you is holding a color. **[PARTNER 1]** and **[PARTNER 2]**, your colors are the two you came in with. **[CHILD NAMES]**, yours are the colors you chose, because you were here long before today and you belong in this just as much.

— *[Couple pours first, slowly, into the shared vase.]*

As your colors settle together, you are choosing each other, and you are choosing this whole family that comes with the two of you.

— *[Children pour next. If a child hesitates, continue without a pause. A parent's hand can rest over a small one.]*

[CHILD NAMES], your colors are part of this now, through the middle of it, where they have always belonged. This new family does not erase anything that came before. It adds to it.

Spoken *to the kids.*

— *[Turn from the couple to the children. Get down to their eye line if they are small. Slow right down.]*

[CHILD NAMES], you did not have to choose a new family. You are standing here helping build one anyway, and that is a brave and generous thing. Whatever else changes, you have a home in this.

— *[Step-parent may speak their vow to the children here, if planned. See the next page. Then the children return to their seats with a quiet word, and the ceremony moves toward the pronouncement.]*

ROBYN'S NOTE

This is the part most couples underuse and the part the children remember. A child's sense of safety comes less from watching the adults marry than from hearing a promise made to *them*, by name.

The step-parent *vow.*

The vows that reach a child share four traits: use the child's name, name the hard part honestly, promise not to replace the other parent, and stay specific instead of grand. Here is the shape I coach.

*"**[CHILD]**, I am not here to replace your dad. You have a dad already, and I would never try to take his place. What I am promising you is this: I will be here. I will show up to your games, I will learn how you like your eggs, and on the hard days I will be in your corner. We will figure this out together. I am lucky to get to."*

— *[Read it slow. Let the specific lines, the games and the eggs, do the work. They are what a child can picture.]*

ROBYN'S NOTE

Leave out *"I will love you exactly like my own."* A kid has excellent instruments for detecting an adult overselling something. One true sentence outlasts a paragraph of poetry.

What I *do not say.*

The classic sand line is *"just as these grains can never be separated again, so will your family be inseparable and whole."* It is lovely for a first marriage. It is the wrong thing to say over a blended family.

For a child who has already watched one family come apart, the word *inseparable* can sting instead of soothe, and *never be separated again* is a promise nobody at the altar can guarantee.

— *[Trade permanence language for creation language everywhere. "We are making something" instead of "this can never break."]*

ROBYN'S NOTE

That small shift protects the kid who knows, better than any adult in the room, that families sometimes change. Say what is true and the child believes the rest.

Swap the *ritual.*

The words on the last pages hold whatever object you put in the middle. If sand is not right for your kids, change the thing in their hands, not the moment.

For a self-conscious teen. Use ribbons. Each person ties a colored ribbon around the couple's joined hands and says one line. A thirteen-year-old who would be mortified pouring sand will often light up given a sentence to say.

For a keepsake they wear. Use a medallion of three interlocking circles, given to each child just after the pronouncement, the third circle standing for their place in the family.

One vase, *two jobs.*

Skip the candle outdoors. Wind kills it, and for a blended family a single merged flame can imply the old families dissolve into one. If you want light, frame it as new light added to the light already there.

For a four-year-old and a teen at once. Keep the ritual shared, split the jobs by age. The little one pours with a parent's hand over theirs. The teen gets the closing job: reading one line, or being the one who caps and seals the vase.

ROBYN'S NOTE

Give the older kid the role with the most quiet authority. A teen reads *"you handed me the symbolic part"* as respect, and respect is exactly what a teenager in a blended family is scanning for.

If it gets *away from you.*

If a kid freezes. Say, "and we are so glad you are here with us," and move on. No pause, no spotlight. The room reads it as warmth, never as a miss.

If a child dumps the whole color at once. Smile and keep going. They will, and it is always a little wonderful. The pour was never about precision.

If a child changes their mind at the altar. Honor it instantly. A kid handing you the sand instead of pouring is still taking part. Let them, and say nothing about the switch.

Three things *before you read it aloud.*

This is one ceremony, marked the way I would mark my own. Treat it as a working draft and it starts sounding like your family.

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i

Have the consent conversation, one child at a time.

Before sand, before colors, sit with each kid alone and ask if they want a role. Give real options, including the seat of honor. Then set a quiet backup for the one who might freeze.

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ii

Fill every bracket a week out, not on the day.

Type the final names into each [BRACKET], let each child pick their color, and print two copies on cardstock. The day-of script has no brackets left in it.

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iii

Stage the walk-up and the walk-back.

Bring the kids up by name for the pour, then walk them to a front-row seat once they are done, so nobody is stranded facing a crowd for twenty minutes. Dress them for a real kid's day.

The Couple's Ceremony Kit

Now write the rest of the ceremony *for your whole family*

Inside the kit

- → Complete ceremonies in every style to put this ritual in, and the six-question quiz that picks yours
- → The interview question that digs up the detail your vows are missing
- → Why one of your promises should be about the water filter
- → The three pages to hand your officiant, so they never have to guess what you want

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A NOTE FROM ROBYN

Where this *came from.*

PULLED FROM	The blended family unity moment I read at weddings across NYC and the Hudson Valley, marked with the cues I actually use. The approach is field-tested over *more than 300 ceremonies*.
WHAT IS IN THE KIT	The consent conversation script, the format-by-format decision guide, step-parent vow templates by child age, and the full ceremony build. All of it in *the Couple's Ceremony Kit*.
USE THIS FREELY	Print it, mark it up, read it at the rehearsal, hand a copy to whoever is standing up front.
IF YOU READ ONE	The rest of my scripts and ceremony notes live at *www.robynashleyweddings.com*.

Marked from a working ceremony, with the cues I read from at the front of the aisle.

About this ritual, and the families it has been read for.