

Smart Stepparenting

Parenting in stepfamilies is a two, three, or four-person (sometimes more!) dance. Parent-stepparent harmony is the crux of successful parenting within your home. The two most critical relationships in any stepfamily home are the marriage and the stepparent-stepchildren relationships.

Mistake: Assuming that stepparenting is the sole responsibility of the stepparent.

Many people assume incorrectly that stepparenting is the sole responsibility of the stepparent. This assumption pits spouses against one another when the stepparent flounders or upsets the children. On the contrary, stepparenting is a two-person task.

What is needed most is a working alliance between the parent and stepparent that helps to clarify the stepparent's role. Smart stepparenting means planning and parenting together.

Rewards & Challenges of Stepparenting

We have all heard horror stories about stepparents. But not all children feel negatively toward stepparents.

When I was four years old my father died, and two years later my mother met my stepdad. There were six of us kids to raise, plus he had three from his previous marriage. When they got married he helped her raise us and treated us like his very own kids. I never knew my father; Ted is the only real father I ever knew. Though we have had our ups and downs I would never trade him for any other father in the world. – a Stepdaughter

Remember that when the “going gets tough” that all the hard work and discomfort of stepparenting can pay off.

Be Patient!

General stepfamily integration and bonding with a stepchild hardly ever happens as quickly as adults want it to.

- So why does it take so long to combine a stepfamily and bond with a stepchild?

Qualities of Effective Stepparents

The attitudes and expectations you carry either make bonding with a stepchild easier or more difficult. In addition, there are many factors that, in truth, have very little to do with you, and everything to do with the child and his or her other relationships and past.

- 1. Effective Stepparents Enjoy the Relationship They Have Now**
- 2. Effective Stepparents Have Realistic Expectations**

3. Effective Stepparents Grow into Their Role

4. Effective Stepparents Move Gradually into Discipline

- A. The baby-sitter role. B. The "uncle/aunt" role.
C. The "parent" or stepparent role.**

5. Effective Stepparents Make Their Marriage a Priority

6. Effective Stepparents Recognize the Losses of Their Stepchildren

Key Points: • Early in remarriage biological parents need to remain primary caregivers and disciplinarians. Handing off the children to the new stepparent sabotages his or her ability to build a relationship.

- Early in remarriage parents should empower stepparents by communicating to the children their expectation of obedience.
- Stepparents need to grow into their relationship with stepchildren. Be friendly at first and support the house rules. Seek to be mutually suitable with your stepchildren and enjoy the relationship you have now.
- Encourage and insist that children maintain regular, consistent contact with the parent living in the other home. Do your best to have a functional co-parent relationship.
- Let children set the pace for their relationship with the stepparent. Consider each child individually. Give and expect affection, nurturance, and emotional sharing only to the degree children appear open to it.
- Parents should consider the stepparent's input into child rearing. Listen and consider their input.
- Stepparents need to learn to be a nonjudgmental sounding board for parents while remembering that the parent-child bond is a protective one. Stepparents should attempt to listen and affirm without criticizing the child. "I can see you are angry at Jane for lying to us. What do you suggest?"
- Finally, but most important, effective parent-stepparent teams begin with healthy marriages. Take time to nurture your relationship, date on a regular basis, learn to communicate and resolve conflict, and enjoy a healthy sexual relationship. Make your marriage a priority!