

## **Ten Steps Toward Successful Stepparenting**

For children, the blending of two families may not be an easy process. There is no "instant" love. Adjusting to the new relationships takes time. Although the adults have fallen in love and have decided to live together, the children may not desire the stepfamily situation. Parents need realistic expectations concerning the children's periods of adjustment. Time will be necessary to adjust to the loss of the former family structure and to accept the new situation.

### **Family Changes**

Merging families bring together many differences. A teenager may now be followed around by a five-year-old stepbrother. The celebrating of holidays will change as the new family integrates customs and begins new ones. With the changes taking place in the new household, children need some things to remain the same. Keeping the daily schedule the same can help add continuity to a changing family structure. If your child is actively involved in a particular sport, for example, keep him/her involved. Do not make unnecessary changes.

Each family has resources in addition to money. They include both time and affection. How you share or distribute these resources can create arguments, hurt feelings, or jealousy. Be aware of the possible effects as you work within your new family.

### **Loyalties**

Children have loyalties to parents. A child may feel that showing affection toward a stepparent is betraying the biological parent. The child who has lived in a single-parent household may have difficulty sharing that parent.

Adults may also experience loyalty conflicts. Parents may feel guilty over not living with biological children. The stepparent may have difficulty accepting live-in stepchildren.

The new stepfamily creates new relationships. Family members may be unclear as to what their roles and expectations are within the family. Are the stepparents comfortable disciplining the children and enforcing the limits? Do the children know what role the new family members play? Do they know that their stepfather can assign chores to be done? How should they refer to the stepparent's parents? Are they also grandparents?

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1. Provide neutral territory. If your budget allows, consider moving into a new home.
2. Don't try to fit a preconceived role. Be yourself.
3. Set limits and enforce them. The parent and stepparent need to work out disciplinary actions in advance, then support each other when the rules are being enforced.

4. Allow an outlet for children's feelings about the natural parent. The children will maintain affection for their natural parent. Do not take this personally.
5. Expect ambivalence. Feelings of love and hate by the stepchild may change every few hours, or few days. Allow the children to appropriately express their difficulties with the new situation and/or step parent.
6. Avoid mealtime misery. Mealtime can be laden with emotions of "how it used to be." Try to make this time as peaceful as possible.
7. Don't expect instant love.
8. Don't take all the responsibility. The children have some, too. There are two people involved in any relationship. Therefore, if things are less than perfect, don't take all the guilt.
9. Be patient. The first few months, or years, may have difficult periods.
10. Maintain the privacy of the marital relationship. A solid stepfamily relationship is based on a strong marital relationship. Blending a family takes time and patience. Like any other family unit, however, it too can be healthy and strong.

References:

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