

ARE YOU A KID IN A STEPFAMILY?

8-13 YEARS? - KEEP READING:

It's often not your choice – but it happens to lots of people.

Families do change over time so you are not alone.

The following information will hopefully help you understand what's happening in your family and give you some ideas to help you continue to enjoy life as a kid. Pick some, talk to your parents or a trusted adult such as a teacher, and give them a try.

Hey, I had a relationship with them **before you did.**



BEING A KID IN A STEPFAMILY

A FEW THINGS TO CONSIDER:

WHAT IS A STEPFAMILY ANYWAY?

If one of your parents has started a relationship with another adult, and they see themselves as a couple, then you may be in a stepfamily.

Even if they don't live together you may see a lot of this other adult and they become part of the family.

If you do live together, then everyone has to be patient and understanding and may need to say what they need while you all settle in. Don't be surprised if it's hard or upsetting sometimes during this settling in time.

CONFUSED?

You might feel... "I didn't choose this – why do I have to live with this person?"

Often young people say "I just don't like the feeling of my Mum or Dad being with someone else". That is fair enough, young people often find it hard to imagine why an adult is in another relationship instead of just focusing on their children.

Generally adults are happiest when they have some other adult to be with. It is not the same way they love you – but adults usually want a special friend their own age too.

JEALOUS?

When your parents were together it probably just seemed normal and you never felt jealous. They were just your parents spending some time together. However when a new person arrives you might feel a bit jealous, which is normal.

You might be resentful and feel like saying: "Hey, I had a relationship with them BEFORE you did!" which is true. The best thing is to be honest and say to your parent "I feel a bit jealous – can we make Saturday afternoons our special time together".

You might even tell your parent "I don't mind her

or him being around but you have to remember to give me attention as well".

If you can give the adults some time alone then your stepparent will be happier to set aside some time so your parent can be just with you.

Sometimes your feelings are very strong and you might feel really angry or sad. Don't hide how you feel – talk to people you can trust and remember that over time things do tend to settle down. People find ways of living together and it won't remain tense forever.

DISLOYAL?

It's understandable to feel like if you get on well with your stepdad or stepmum then you are being disloyal to your real dad or your real mum.

But there's enough "good feeling" to go around. It's best to leave it to the adults to sort out their differences... if they want to. Just try *your* best to get on with whoever you are with at the time.

If any adult in the situation tries to get you to tell them information about the other parent or says nasty things about them, just say "**When you talk like that it's not fair for me because I love all of you – please stop**". They will usually feel bad and stop doing it.

If they say something insulting that hurts you about another adult in the situation you can say "**I wouldn't let them talk about you like that, so I don't want to hear you talking about them like that**".

Young people should not be caught up in the problems of adults. The adults made the decision to be together and have children and now they have to handle breaking up and repartnering – it's tough but it's adult life.

DON'T LIKE YOUR STEPPARENT?

You might feel a bit guilty that you don't like your parent's new partner but the good news is you don't have to.

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Later in your life you might have girlfriends or boyfriends that your parents might not really like, but it will be your life so you can make the choice.

The important thing to remember is that if you treat your stepparent with respect – that means saying good morning/night, greeting them when you see them, thanking them if they cook you a meal or wash your clothes and occasionally chat with them – then that is enough.

Ask them to also treat you with respect. This will make everyone a lot happier. You may still have arguments but avoid swearing at them or abusing them.

SOME IDEAS YOU CAN TRY WHILE YOU SETTLE INTO A STEPFAMILY:

Work out what you really enjoy doing – write down 4 or 5 things.

You might do a weekly timetable which includes soccer with dad, meeting a friend at the park, going to the local pool, walking your dog, playing on the computer with your brother.

Do more of the things you like – try to have some fun rather than worrying too much about what each member of the family is doing.

Tell people what you would like in a respectful way. There's a big difference between saying in a nasty voice "Stop trying to kiss my mum – you are gross!" and saying in a pleasant voice "Would you mind not doing that so much in front of me, it makes me feel uncomfortable". Adults respond much better when you speak to them respectfully.

Arrange to spend some time with your friends, meet up with them, play sports or join a club, so you don't focus only on your family all the time.

Suggest a family meeting once a fortnight so you can all mention the things that annoy you and try to reach a solution but also to plan for some exciting things you would like to do as a stepfamily eg. having a movie night once a fortnight in your living room.

It's a good idea to turn to your parent first with problems rather than bringing your stepparent into it if they don't need to become involved.

Sometimes it can be easy to blame the new person for everything that goes wrong. Even in families where the parents are still together there is conflict and jealousy and anger at times – that's normal.

MOST importantly remember that your parents will continue to love you just as much as they always did, even though your family has changed.

Things will settle down. If you need reassurance talk to your parent (at a good time when they are not stressed or busy) about what's going on for you. If that isn't possible it's ok to have a chat with a trusted adult like a relative or older sibling, a teacher or a school wellbeing officer. It helps so much to talk about your feelings. You can also make contact with Kids helpline.

Support for Children

Kids Helpline—for young people between 5 and 25 years 1800 551 800
www.kidshelp.com.au

Family Separation: A Guide for Teens
www.youth.csa.gov.au

Headspace, Australia's National Youth Mental Health Foundation website
www.headspace.org.au

Youth Beyond Blue 1300 224 636
www.youthbeyondblue.com

Stepfamilies Australia www.stepfamily.org.au

Family Relationships Advice Line 1800 050 321

Lifeline 13 11 14

Raising Children www.raisingchildren.net.au

My Mob App – a positive family communication tool/app for you to stay connected to one another wherever you live and whatever your family looks like – go to www.my.mob.com