

STEPFAMILIES – BEING THE PRIMARY (BIOLOGICAL) PARENT

There is no doubt that it is around the **family** and the home that all the greatest virtues are created, strengthened and maintained.

– *Winston Churchill*

When a new adult relationship is formed, this is often a really enjoyable time. However when there are children involved, the situation can become somewhat challenging as well.

Your new relationship and the bond you have as a couple needs to be strong and secure, when you are negotiating your way through being a stepfamily. It may be tested along the way, but taking some time out together when you can will strengthen and reconnect this bond. Lots of honest communication is required to define everybody's new roles and responsibilities, especially in the initial stages. Try not to assume anything, be aware that you have separate loyalties to your children and new partner, and be open and honest when talking about these loyalties.

A FEW THINGS TO CONSIDER

Don't expect everyone to bond straight away – this will take time; allow your children the time to make connections in their own way.

Don't assume that your new partner will automatically want a relationship with your children, discuss the role that he/she thinks will work.

- » Continue to discipline your children – ask your partner to support you with this, but don't be too actively involved. Children are generally more accepting of their parent doing the disciplining.



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- » Keep an open mind. Your children might really enjoy the new situation but at the same time they might feel threatened.
- » Don't expect loving relationships to form straight away, if ever. Encourage an environment of respect and understanding as a priority.
- » Be aware that you have separate loyalties to your ex-partner, your new partner, your children and your stepchildren, and that's natural.
- » Even though you might make it very obvious that you love your children, they still like to hear it as well (this goes for your partner too!).

LET'S GET PRACTICAL

- » Prepare yourself for this transition. Take the time to educate yourself more about the realities of what's involved. It can bring untold joy and lifelong relationships, even though it's undeniably difficult at times.
- » Balance your time – set aside alone time with your children, the whole family, your stepchildren and with your partner. Having alone time makes children feel special, even just 5–10mins of reading before bed can make all the difference.
- » Work with your partner to come up with a set of household rules and chores for the children, try and be fair and age appropriate – you may need a set of consequences as well.
- » Create appropriate boundaries with the other parent of your children and discuss these with your new partner.
- » Talk about feelings and emotions, get your children to try and identify how they are feeling. By knowing how your children are feeling you can help them work through these feelings.
- » Communicate all the time. Role model this communication in front of the children, with your new partner and your ex-partner. Set a positive

example for your children to follow by saying things like “Maybe we could...” or “I feel...” Rather than “You should...”

- » Do something enjoyable together as a family on a regular basis. Whether it's the park, a movie, swimming, etc. make it on the same day every month. Write this on the calendar so younger kids can see and look forward to it.
- » If you or the family are struggling with emotions, expectations or even challenging situations seek some professional help, it may only take a couple of sessions which could just make all the difference!

SEEKING MORE INFORMATION

- » Read books or do a stepfamily course – it can make all the difference
- » Seek support. Join a face-to-face or online group so you can talk to others in the same situation and not feel alone
- » See a counsellor that is familiar with stepfamily dynamics. They are full of advice and can help with things like, communication skills, setting boundaries and respecting others.

Where to access further help:

Stepfamilies Australia www.stepfamily.org.au
or 9663 6733

Family Relationships Advice Line 1800 050 321

Lifeline 13 11 14

Raising Children www.raisingchildren.net.au

Men's Line Australia: 1300 789 978

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