



Stepfamilies Tip Sheet: Biological Parents



Being the biological parent

Forming a new relationship is often a joyous time, but the situation can become challenging when children are involved.

Your bond with your new partner will need 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 connection.

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.

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 they think will work.
- Continue to discipline your children. Ask your partner to support you with this, but for them to not be overly involved. Children are generally more accepting of their biological parent doing the disciplining. They know you better, and are more used to it.
- Keep an open mind. Your children might really enjoy the new situation but they may feel threatened. They may even feel both at the same time.

- 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 the transition. Take the time to educate yourself more about the realities of what's involved. Being in a stepfamily 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, alone time with your partner, and time together with the whole family. 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, making sure to be fair and age appropriate. You may need a set of consequences as well. These should be devised together, but delivered by you to the children.
- Create appropriate boundaries with the other parent of your children and discuss these with your new partner.
- Talk about feelings and emotions, and get your children to try and identify how they are feeling. If you don't know how your children are feeling, you can't work through them with them. Remember that, for them, they may have never experienced something like a new stepparent, and that it's their first time being their age. Things which seem obvious or unimportant to you can be a big deal for them.
- Always communicate. Role model this communication in front of the children, with your new and ex-partners. 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. This could be going to the park, watching a movie, swimming or whatever works for you. Make it on the same day every month and write it on the calendar so younger kids can see and look forward to it.

- If you or your family are struggling with emotions, expectations or even challenging situations, seek some professional help. It may only take a couple of sessions, and could just make all the difference!

Seeking more information

- Read books or do a stepfamily course.
- Seek support. Join a face-to-face or online group so you can talk to others in the same situation and feel less 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