



# **Stepfamilies Tip Sheet: Kids 8-13**



## I'm a stepchild... What now?

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

Families change over time, so you're 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 and give them a try, and talk to your parents or a trusted adult such as a teacher.

## 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 might be in a stepfamily.

Even if they don't live together, you may see a lot of this other adult. If you do live together, then everyone will need to be patient and understanding. They may also need to talk about some things while you all settle in, like what you'd like to call them, and what you expect from them.

It can sometimes be hard and upsetting while you're all settling in. But be kind to yourself, and be kind to them. It might not seem like it, but it's hard for them as well.

## Feeling jealousy?

When your parents were together, it probably seemed normal, and you didn't feel jealous. They were just your parents spending some time together, which is normal. However, when a new person arrives, you might feel a bit jealous – which is normal.

You might want to say, "Hey, I knew them first!" Which is true. You did! The best thing to do is be honest and tell your parent, "I feel a bit jealous, can we make one afternoon our special time together?"

You might even tell your parent, "I don't mind them being around, but you have to remember to give me attention as well." Just remember that your parent loving their new partner doesn't mean they love you any less.



## Wanting more time with your parent?

Remember, giving the adults some time alone is important. Think about it like this: if you get sad when you don't get to spend enough time with just your parent, their partner will also get sad if they don't get to spend enough time with just your parent.

Sometimes, your feelings can get very strong and you might feel really angry or sad. Don't hide how you feel! Talk to people you trust.

Just remember that things often settle down over time. Think about a change that's happened before – maybe something big like moving house, or maybe something small like your favourite show ending. It probably felt hard at first, or scary, right? Everything was new, and you wanted things to go back to the way they were. But over time, it probably got better. Your new house might have been better, or you might've made new friends. You might've found a new show you liked better. Things change, and that's okay.

## 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 that you don't have to. When you're older, you might have a partner your parents don't really like, but it will be your life and your choice. Just remember to give them a chance. Sometimes, people think they don't like someone, when really they just don't like that they're different to what they're used to.

At the end of the day, if you're respectful, that's enough. Say good morning/night, greet them when they see you, thank them if they cook a meal or wash your clothes and chat with them occasionally. You may still argue, but stay respectful. You wouldn't like if they swore at you or said nasty things, so they wouldn't like it if you did either.



## Feeling disloyal?

Sometimes, you'll have the opposite problem. If you like your stepparent too much, it can feel like you're being disloyal to your birth parent(s). But there's enough "good feeling" to go around. Liking a stepparent doesn't mean you've stopped loving your birth parent(s), just like making a new friend or enjoying a new teacher doesn't mean you love your birth parent(s) any less.

## My parents are arguing?

It's best to leave the adults to sort out their differences... if they want to. Just try your best to get along with whoever you're with.

If any adult asks for information about another 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."

This will make them feel bad, and they'll probably stop. If they don't stop, and keep doing it, then talk to a trusted adult – or the parent – and let them know.

If they say something insulting about another adult, and it hurts you, then 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. At the end of the day, the adults made the decision to be together and have children, and now they have to handle breaking up or finding new partners. It's tough, but it's adult life. And it is not your fault.



## Some things you can try while settling in to a stepfamily:

Work out what you really like doing. Write down four or five things.

- **Do more of the things you like.** Try to have some fun rather than worrying about what each member of the family is up to.
- **Tell people what you want in a respectful way.** There's a big difference between saying, "Stop trying to kiss my mum, it's gross!" in a nasty voice and saying, "Would you mind not doing that in front of me so much? It makes me uncomfortable". Adults respond well to being treated with respect, just like you.
- **Arrange to spend some time with friends.** Meet up with them to play sports or video games. Joining a club can also be good. It's just so you're not thinking about family all of the time.
- **Suggest a family meeting once a fortnight.** You can all use this time to discuss things which have been bothering you, what you're happy about and what you're not happy about. You can use this time to think of solutions and fun things you can do together – like a movie night once a fortnight.

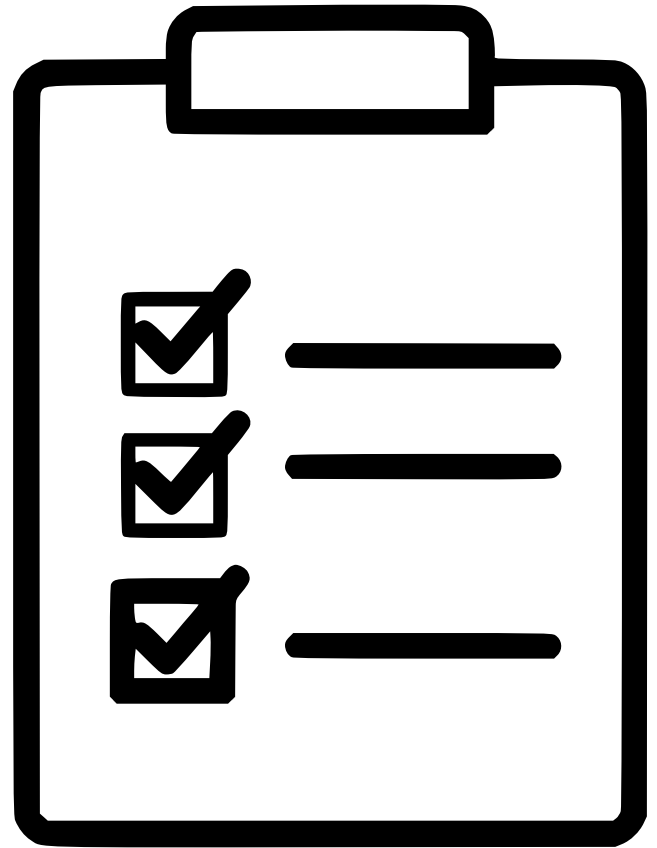
### Things to remember:

It's usually better to go to your birth parent about problems first, rather than bringing your stepparent into something when they don't need to be involved.

Sometimes, it can be easy to blame everything that goes wrong on a new person. But every family has problems, and everybody gets angry or upset sometimes. Think about it this way: if a new teacher started working at your school, would you blame them for a window being broken or you getting annoyed at another student? Probably not.

It can be hard, but it does get better. **MOST IMPORTANTLY**, remember that your parents won't love you any less just because your family has changed. But it's still important to talk about your feelings. If you are worried, talk to your parent (at a good time when they're not stressed or busy). If that isn't possible, you can also talk to a trusted adult or an older sibling. Everybody needs someone to talk to, and it helps so much.

You can also talk to Kids Helpline.



All anyone can ask is that you do your best! Try not to be too hard on yourself or your new stepparent. It does get easier!



### Support:

Kids Helpline - For young people aged 5 and 25  
1800 551 800  
[www.kidshelp.com.au](http://www.kidshelp.com.au)

Family Separation: A Guide for Teens  
[www.youth.csa.gov.au](http://www.youth.csa.gov.au)

Headspace, Australia's National Mental Health Foundation  
[www.headspace.org.au](http://www.headspace.org.au)

Youth Beyond Blue  
1300 224 636  
[www.youthbeyondblue.com](http://www.youthbeyondblue.com)

Stepfamilies Australia  
[www.stepfamily.org.au](http://www.stepfamily.org.au)

Family Relationships Advice Line  
1800 050 321

Raising Children  
[www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au)

