



Stepfamilies Tip Sheet: Teenagers



I'm a stepchild... What now?

Being in a stepfamily usually means being in a family where one of your parents has found a new partner. They may come and live with you, or you may just see them a lot. Maybe you really like this person, which is great, but it's also okay to have mixed feelings. It can take some getting used to, and it's normal to have days when you're not happy about being in a stepfamily. Even so, you will need to settle in as a family and make some adjustments along the way, so don't expect it to be smooth sailing every day.

If you are finding it hard to get used to being in a stepfamily, don't panic, that's normal. It also won't last forever. People have a way of getting used to changes and new relationships, and we're very good at finding a way to get along that works for us.

One thing is for sure – families never stop changing. Even families where the parents stay together change – children move out, parents move houses and very little ever stays the same. You are also not alone because step and blended families are becoming more and more common.

"She's nice, but she annoys me wanting me to clean up my room! It's my room after all, what is it to her?"

Common reactions

When you are in a stepfamily you might feel:

- Sad or angry that your family has changed.
- Under pressure to like your new stepparent.
- Pleased that this nice person has come into your family and your mum or dad is a lot happier, but still finding it weird sometimes.
- Split in half – so it feels hard to stay close and be loyal to both parents at first.
- Left out, because your parent gives the new partner a lot of attention.
- Annoyed that this stepparent also comes with their own kids that you have to deal with.



Ideas that can help:

- Make a list of things you like doing (playing music, being part of a club or a sports team). Fill up your week and spend time with friends so you are not so focused on what's happening at home.
- Ask for support from your friends. You might be surprised. Often, when we share problems we have at home, you learn that things aren't as perfect for others as we might think.
- Keep a diary or a blog about what it's like to be in a stepfamily. It can help you feel better and it's good to look back when things have changed.
- Work on accepting that in life there are some things that you just can't change. Think about it and work out what you DO and DON'T have control over (e.g. you can't control how someone else acts, just how you respond to them). This isn't an easy thing to come to terms with, but understanding this will make lots of challenges easier to face.
- Be smart and make a plan to be respectful towards your stepparent – whether you like them or not. Saying normal things like good morning, hi and bye, thanks for dinner etc. will stop them complaining about you to your parent. Everyone deserves respect and if you are communicating civilly then you can ask them to do the same (eg "Please speak to me nicely, like I speak to you").
- Request a family meeting if you have a big problem to discuss. Make sure you LISTEN to other people's point of view and ask them to then listen to yours without interrupting. Stay calm and be clear about what you want, rather than getting angry and walking off in a bad mood.
- If you have things to say to your family members but you feel uncomfortable about it – then write them a letter. It can be a good chance to explain why you have behaved as you have, and tell them how you would like things to be in the future.
- If you don't like your new stepparent disciplining you (setting rules and consequences) then ask that this be handled by your parent. It's better to be respectful while doing so – just take your parent aside and say "I think that would work better for everyone". Adults don't know all the answers, they are going through a transition period too.
- Recontact old friends or extended family you haven't seen for a while. It feels good to be connected to other people who know you well.



- This is a challenging one... try to imagine what life is like for your stepparent. They probably didn't choose this situation either, they just fell in love with your parent. If you are brave enough, you can ask them, "So what's this family situation like for you?" and listen to what they have to say. You'll be surprised by how much it can improve things. You don't need to agree with them, you just need to listen and try to understand where they're coming from. If you can go easy on them for a while you might find they show a different side of themselves and things will get easier. Sometimes young people can be the ones that fix up these situations because the adults don't always know how.
- Let the little things go – try not to make a fight over every small detail. If somebody annoys you, try walking away. You have better things to do with your time. It is ok to seek out some positive support during this time. See a counsellor that is familiar with parenting and stepfamily dynamics. They can help with things like communication skills and managing your emotions.

Where to access further help:

Stepfamilies Australia
www.stepfamily.org.au

Family Relationships Advice Line
1800 050 321

Lifeline
13 11 14

Raising Children
www.raisingchildren.net.au