

Misguided vs. Effective Stepparenting

[Stepfamily Association of America - Pittsburgh Chapter](#)

The contrast between a misguided and an effective approach to stepparenting provides a key to success in the stepfamily. Clearly, the effective stepparent works with accurate information and chooses specific behaviors to build toward positive relationships.

The Misguided Stepparent

Tries to replace the absent parent
 Feels insecure about stepparent role
 Wants to own children and their affections
 Attempts to cut ties with noncustodial parent
 Assumes children cannot love several adults
 Creates loyalty conflicts for children
 Demands love and acceptance...
 Expects to care about stepchildren immediately
 Expects children to express affection right away
 Feels guilty when children express affection they don't really feel
 Insists feelings for stepchildren and biological children are the same...
 Tries to deny rather than accept differences in feelings
 Feels guilty for loving own children "more"
 Overcompensates with stepchildren by giving gifts, spending extra time, expressing phony feelings
 Manages everyone else's relationships as
 Takes on problems of all family members as own
 Interferes in communication efforts of siblings, kids, biological parents
 Keeps family members from forming direct relationships with one another
 Insists on being included in all activities
 Deprives parents and children of needed private time and space together
 Assumes peacemaker role
 Fears another family loss...
 Believes difficulties imply failure
 Denies problems exist
 Shuts out negative emotions
 Reacts defensively when stated feelings and real feelings clash
 Strives to be perfect and thus, counteract "wicked stepparent" myth...
 Allows no imperfection in self as parent figure
 Avoids mistakes at all costs
 Suppresses negative emotions
 Refuses to state any opinions that might create conflict
 Feels sorry for children of loss...
 Tries to make up for children's parental loss
 Pities children and delays grieving process necessary to heal
 Indulges, pampers and therefore prevents stepchildren from learning to understand life as it really is with its pain and adversities
 Insists on family unity
 Views goals as happiness and harmony at all costs
 Uses family "togetherness" to show outsiders "how great we're doing"
 Dictates activities and denies free choices among family members
 Diverts family members from preferred activities

The Effective Stepparent

Recognizes importance of noncustodial parent.
 Respects children's need and right to love that parent.
 Helps stepchildren nurture relationship by encouraging them to write, phone, visit.
 Allows pictures and mementos of biological parent without creating conflict.
 Invites parent to important milestone ceremonies and events.
 Strives to be added parent figure and friend rather than substitute parent.
 Acknowledges existing bond between new spouse and children.
 Realizes it's natural to feel closer to biological children.
 Reduces jealousy and competition for time and attention
 Controls resentment when child and parent need time alone
 Allows time for relationships to develop...
 Focuses on process of developing as a family unit
 Values each small success as evidence of relationship growth
 Minimizes worrying or trying to force progress
 Respects and accepts others as new family forms
 Manages own relationships with each child...
 Avoids interfering in other people's problems unless invited
 Encourages family members to care for own needs and relationships
 Understands family life cannot always be happy...
 Accepts that problems exist
 Understands that unhappy experiences teach children coping skills
 Allows full expression of emotions whether negative or positive, pleasant or unpleasant
 Possesses the courage to be imperfect...
 Rejects fairy-tale myths and unrealistic media portrayals of stepfamilies
 Understands every mistake does not reflect cruel-stepparent image
 Realizes the way people learn is by making mistakes, thinking about them and trying again
 Shares own mistakes to give children permission to be imperfect and human
 Accepts grief and loss as part of life's experience...
 Encourages children to face the reality of death or divorce that preceded stepfamily
 Feels empathy, not sympathy, with children of loss
 Helps kids confront and express feelings that grief elicits
 Provides strength and encouragement so children can move in to the future
 Lets go...
 Permits children to belong to two families with a minimum of fuss
 Allows children to spend time with peers, activities and other parent without fearing the stability of the stepfamily is threatened
 Plans family activities without forcing participation
 Uses time away from children to enhance relationship with spouse