

Stepfamily Information

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Statistics show that in the year 2000 there will be more stepfamilies in America than biological families. The stepfamily has some different challenges than the typical biological family. Some of those challenges include jealousy and disruption from the ex, children and loyalty issues, discipline concerns, favoritism, stepmother issues, stepfather issues and stepchildren issues. Stepparenting is a challenge and it helps to have some resources and information. Listed below are some guidelines for stepfamilies.

GUIDELINES FOR STEPFAMILIES

1. It is very helpful if a stepfamily can start out in neutral territory like moving into their own house or apartment. Avoid moving into one of the spouses homes if it was the biological families home first.
2. Get in the habit of having a weekly family meeting. Allow each member of the family to speak freely on issues. Use the family meetings to plan vacations and fun. Accept influence from the children and give them a feeling of control by allowing them some say so in family decisions.
3. A healthy couple relationship is a must for a stepfamily to exist. The couple's relationship should come first with the children a very close second. A strong adult relationship can protect the children from another family loss and it can provide the children with a positive model of what a good marriage looks like.
4. Have realistic expectations. The expectation of "instant love" between stepparents and stepchildren can lead to disappointment and many difficulties. Let the relationships develop slowly over time. Don't force relationships. Allow them to evolve with patience and understanding.
5. Understand that there will be loyalty issues. Since children are part of two biological parents, they usually have very strong pulls to both of their natural parents. These divided loyalties make it difficult for children to relate comfortably to all of the parental adults in their lives. Understand that rejection of a stepparent might not have anything to do with the personal characteristics of the stepparent. As the children and adults learn that they can care for more than two parental adults, then the loyalty issues and conflicts can diminish and the step-relationships can improve.
6. Work at not getting the children caught in the middle of ex-spouses issues. Do your best to maintain a courteous relationship for the well-being of the children.
7. Create new family patterns and traditions. Adults and children have a family history that can cause conflict in trying to blend together as a stepfamily. Develop new ways of coming together as a family and new traditions that are just the stepfamilies.
8. As a stepparent don't try to compete with the biological parent. Instead work on creating a friendship built on respect with your stepchildren. Let the biological parent do most of the discipline until the stepchild feels comfortable with your parental role.
9. If your family includes "visiting" children understand that they usually feel strange and like outsiders in your neighbourhood. It helps if they can have their own space in your home. This can be a drawer or shelf for their personal possessions that no one else has. Some place or space that is all their own is very helpful.
10. Include the "visiting" stepchildren in family chores and projects. They will feel more connected to the group in this way. Allow them to bring a friend with them occasionally to visit to help with the adjustment.

Because stepfamilies are born of loss, a mixture of feelings can show their selves quite often. These feelings include jealousy, rejection, guilt, anger, frustration, hurt and disappointment. Seek understanding when these feelings arise. Allow them to surface and release. Empathize as much as possible. Try to walk in their shoes and feel their feelings.