

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Analysis of Data:

Introduction:

The survey instrument, rapport building session, and the interview process used in gathering data, were constructed and organized to allow for a non-threatening conversational style in which participants might more readily share their opinions and concerns. All knew the expectations of the researcher prior to the interview and had been guaranteed that their personal identity would be kept confidential. There was no set pattern of responses.

Background of Participants:

Figure 1: Initial Family Break-up

Subject #	Death/Divorce/Never Married	Custody
#1. 46 year old male	Death	Mother
#2. 45 year old male	Divorce	Father
#3. 32 year old female	Never Married/Separation (later death of father in car accident)	Mother
#4. 30 year old female	Divorce	Mother
#5. 16 year old female	Death	Father
#6. 14 year old male	Divorce (later death of mother-drug related)	Father
#7. 13 year old female	Divorce	Joint
#8. 12 year old male	Divorce	Joint
#9. 12 year old male	Divorce	Joint
#10. 12 year old female	Never Married/Separation	then Mother Mother
Break-up Summary: 6 (60%) Divorce 2 (20%) Never Married 2 (20%) Death		
Custody Summary: 3 (30%) Father 3 (30%) Joint 4 (40%) Mother		

Clarifying Probe: Tell me who you are as a person.

Ten voluntary participants, 4 adults and 6 children, were interviewed.

Figure 2: Developmental Levels

Developmental Level	Age	Male	Female	Currently A Stepparent
Adult	46	1	0	Yes
	45	1	0	Yes
	32	0	1	No
	30	0	1	No
Child	16	0	1	N/A
	14	1	0	N/A
	13	0	1	N/A
	12	1	0	N/A
	12	1	0	N/A
	12	0	1	N/A

Clarifying Probe: Describe your stepfamily for me.

The 10 participants interviewed were living, or had lived, in stepfamily households where the following types of live-in relationships formed the parental bond:

Figure 3: Relationship Types

TYPE	GROUP	MALES	FEMALES	ADULTS	CHILDREN
Total Re-partnering					
Unions	13	4	4	2	6
Multi-partnering	4	2	2	2	2
Single Partner	5	4	3	1	6
Remarriage	7	2	3	4	1

Summary of 20 Relationship Types: Re-partnering 65% Remarriage 35%

In total, there were 20 stepfamily relationships between the 10 participants. Some

children/adults, because the custodial parent had more than one live-in relationship, had survived several stepfamilies. Others had been members of stepfamily unions formed by both biological parents, in the same time period. These unions had been constructed following:

- An initial marriage followed by a divorce
- An initial marriage followed by a death
- A never married individual having a child from wedlock then separating from the father

Figure 4: Reason For Initial Break-up

TYPE	GROUP	MALES	FEMALES	ADULTS	CHILDREN
Initial/divorce	6	4	2	2	4
Initial/death	2	1	1	1	1
N Mar/Separate	2	0	2	1	1

Other children present in the stepfamily union included biological brothers and sisters, foster siblings, children of the stepparent and mutual children. There were also some half-sibling relationships, which continued on an out of the family basis.

Figure 5: Sibling Relationships

TYPE	TOTAL	BROTHERS (relations)	SISTERS (relations)	ADULTS (subjects)	CHILDREN (subjects)
Bro/Sisters	14	9	5	3 (1 M/ 2 F)	5 (3 M/ 2 F)
Foster bros/sis	6	1	5	1 (1 M)	0 (0 F)
Mutual	8	4	4	2 (1 M/ 1 F)	2 (1 M/ 1 F)
Half-sibling	6	2	4	2 (2 F)	2 (1 M/ 1 F)

In all cases except one (where the Foster parents became a widowed foster parent) the stepchild's family break-up was pre-dated by parental arguments, verbal and/or physical abuse.

Expectations of Stepfamily Relationships:

1. Male – 46 years old

Permanent Foster Mom - Relationship #1 – Remarriage

Question: What were your expectations of the new stepfamily relationship?

Comment:

I remember my male sibling being told (overheard this) about Mom's pending marriage and wondering why I had not been informed too. I was just a teen-ager, but not that young. I could have been told. To the best of my knowledge, I was never told. I remember being aware of the relationship for a few years, and wondering why I hadn't been told.

Question: When you became part of this family, what were your expectations?

Comment:

My expectations of Mom's new relationship was that her being re-married would make it easier for her, both emotionally and financially,,I saw it as an okay thing. I wasn't upset by it. I wasn't expecting to have a personal relationship with him. No lovey, dovey father-son interactions or anything like that....I felt pretty self reliant at that age."

Question: How did this experience meet your expectations?

Comment:

Most things that happened were more good than not good. The only negative issues I had with him were set off by him stepping in to protect Mom when we were in an argument. His being there made no difference to either me or Mom."

2. Male – 45 years old

Father's Relationship #1 – Re-partnering

Question: What were your expectations of the new stepfamily relationship?

Comment: -“No expectations. No notice. There was no consultation, no warning. Things just happened.”

Question: When you became a part of this family, what were your expectations?

Comment: “Well I never really had a problem with her. I mean even though some of that stuff was really embarrassing....I never really thought of her as my stepmother.”

Question: How did this experience meet your expectations?

Comment: No expectations to meet.

She had extreme needs. I have no anger towards her at all. (She) assumed the role of a sibling who was trying to boss the house around....She (! step-mom) “was replaced before she left. In a way, it was hard. I can’t remember the exact day.”

Father’s Relationship #2 – Re- partnering

Question: What were your expectations of the new stepfamily relationship?

Comment: Not told, so no expectations.

There was another lady in town here that Dad asked to come and do books for him...she was married....Anyway, she and Dad hit it off...The next thing, they’re having an affair. So (Step-mom #1) is down the road.

Question: When you became part of this family, what were your expectations?

Comment: I think I had some respect for her for what she did for my dad....(but) as a stepmother, I had contempt for her.

Question: How did the experience meet your expectations?

Comment:

Like she could do things. That was how she commanded authority. She didn’t just say go do it. She would do it....they were the golden years for the family that was still here because they made a lot of money. She got things going for my dad.

Father's Relationship #3 - Remarriage

Question: What were your expectations of the new stepfamily relationship?

Comment: Not told. "I was in the army so I wasn't here."

Question: When you became part of this family, what were your expectations?

Comment:

Well I think what I want to say is that she was evil....She came along within a week after (step-mom #2) died....She actually came to town to try and put the make on this other guy and bumped into Dad at a party and he was on the rebound...People said that when (Step-mom #2) died, Dad went on a big drunk so he was easy pickings. He never dealt with his feelings around (step-mom #2). He just got into this relationship....It's obvious that it was too bad that the other one happened to be there....Everybody from the outside knew that she was just after my dad for his money. You couldn't save Dad from himself.

Question: How did the experience meet your expectations?

Comment: It was such an abusive experience and an excessive abuse of other people for your own gain. It just remains a very black part of my childhood memories."

Mother's Relationship #1 – Re-partnering that turned into a Remarriage

Question: What were your expectations of the new stepfamily relationship?

Comment: (He was aware of this relationship) 'I decided to go and be with Mom because she was alone...when she first left, she wasn't well...she received shock therapy. She was in a bad way. After that, my mom was with my dad's ex-foreman. She finally married him, so he was my step-dad".

Question: When you became a part of this family, what were your expectations?

Comment: "He was fine. A good guy. Drank too much but other than that, a real nice guy." "She (Mom) was great. She knew her Mom stuff."

Question: How did this experience meet your expectations?

Comment: “Mom was at work. I was pretty lonely. I played hooky. The move wasn’t a good idea.”

3. Female – 32 years old

Mother’s Relationship #1 – Re-partnering

Question: What were your expectations of this new stepfamily relationship?

Comment: Not told. She was a very young child at the time.

Question: When you became a part of this family, what were your expectations?

Comment: I don’t know nobody. Just from what my aunt said that the man came over and might be my grandpa.

Question: How did this experience meet your expectations?

Comment: She has many questions still, e.g., “Why didn’t she let my dad know I was his?...She had a year and a half to think about it. I wouldn’t take a child away when one was already there.

Mother’s Relationship #2 – Remarriage then Divorce

Question: What were your expectations of this new stepfamily relationship?

Comment: No awareness. She was only one and a half years old when the marriage occurred.

She married my younger brother’s dad. She told me the story that she already had two kids out of wedlock and she was having a baby with this guy and the family said, “You marry him. You already have two unwed kids.” So she married him.

Question: When you became a member of this family, what were your expectations?

Comment:

I don’t remember. I have memories of grandma and grandpa. I mean I still keep

in touch with them. They're my grandparents. They always have been but I have pictures of him with me when I was young. That's all I remember.

Question: How did this experience meet your expectations?

Comment:

I think it (the marriage) stopped when I was in grade, I can't remember what grade it was. Presents stopped, cards stopped, everything stopped. He made it stop. And when you're a kid you remember that. You remember not having Christmas presents. You remember all of that.

Mother's Relationship #3 – Re-partnering

Question: What were your expectations of this new stepfamily relationship?

Comment: She was not told. The relationship just began.

Oh, there were boyfriends after boyfriends,,,,I guess my mom got into the booze in that time frame and boyfriends were coming and going and fighting. It just seemed we were seeing so much of that. I hate booze. She lived with a guy. He was drunk all the time

Question: When you became a member of this family, what were your expectations?

Comment: Yuk.

Question: How did your experience meet your expectations?

Comment:

He was slimy....He did things to me. He came home drunk and he fondled me on the couch. I was afraid to wake up cause I didn't know how he'd react cause Mom and him would fight and punch each other in the mouth....From 9 to 10, my whole life was awful. I hated that year.

Mother's Relationship #4 – Remarriage

Question: What were your expectations of this new stepfamily relationship?

Comment:

So they went out on a date when I was seven but they didn't start being together until I was twelve...She came to us and told us what she wanted to do.....We moved in with him. Actually, he asked my mom to move in with him because

they were back and forth between houses....My mom said, "No. I'm not moving in with another man unless he marries me. So she put the initiative out and sure enough we moved into his little house. He built two bedrooms for my little brother and me...and they got married in that house.

Question: When you became a member of this family, what were your expectation

Comment:

My brother and I would have our own rooms,,,,Well we knew _____. Like he'd been in our lives for awhile. They'd gone out for a long time...He never pushed us to do anything. We never had to do anything we didn't want to do....He seemed like quite a nice guy. A good family man.

Question: How did your experiences meet your expectations?

Comment:

Her never drank. He wasn't abusive. He never laid a hand on my mom ever. And she wouldn't lay a hand on him...they had so much in common. And like Mom smartened up when she went with him. She quit drinking, fighting and all of that. Like _____, he brings out the good in you. He's a good dad. He turned into my dad.

4. Female – 30 years old

Mother's Relationship #1 – Re-marriage

Question: What were your expectations of this new stepfamily relationship?

Comment: "Without us actually knowing it, they got married. No (I didn't know) and now I see why and when I found out it wasn't really a big deal because he was coming and going all of the time."

Question: When you became a part of this family, what were your expectations?

Comment:

Honestly, nothing. I think just because things had gone so bad with my dad, that I just maybe didn't set any expectations. Maybe because I didn't want to be let down or I don't know, maybe I was just enjoying the time because it was so good.

Question: How did your experience meet your expectations?

Comment: “All we wanted was someone to care, so that was really good. I think the interest was the main factor. He wasn’t trying really hard. You could tell he was just being himself.”

5. Female -16 years old

Father’s Relationship #1 – Re-partnering

Question: What was your expectation of this new stepfamily relationship?

Comment:

I don’t know...I kinda liked stuff, you know, I kinda liked to be with the sisters because I had no sisters....Even I was like, Oh, I want to go to _____ place. I want to spend the night with her. Can I do that?

She asked for a sleepover but it turned into a ‘live-in’ before she fully realized what had happened.

Question: When you became a member of this family, what were your expectations?

Comment: “None. Like it just happened. I don’t really remember when, the time when my stepmother moved in. We never discussed something like that.”

Question: How did your experience meet your expectations?

Comment: Her only expectations were to become friendly with woman’s youngest daughter. This happened. (“And I would say, she’s my sister now.”)

6. Male – 14 years old

Father’s Relationship #1 – Re-partnering

Question: What was your expectation of this new stepfamily relationship?

Comment: “My dad left when I was 2 ½ and 4 months....Later I saw (visited) my stepmom and...then I met her often.”

He was not told that the relationship had started

Question: When you became part of this family, what were your expectations?

Comment:

I met her often and so when I moved in it was kind of like just a little bit of a bigger step” “I remember thinking what the house would look like and then when I drove up the first time and saw it...My expectations were entirely different from what was actually there.”

Question: How did your experience meet your expectations?

Comment: “It’s nice but it has its ups and downs. Like it’s a give and take situation, where I do work and I’ll get some stuff in return. I’ve appreciated my mother’s assistance a lot”

7. Female – 13 years old

Father’s Relationship #1 – Re- partnering

Question: What were your expectations of this new stepfamily?

Comment:

No (I wasn’t told). When I talked to him, he said, ‘That’s how it is,’ (Like live with it!) It didn’t really bother me. I didn’t live with him so it never bothered me....(If I lived there) he should have talked to me about it and asked if it mattered (to me).”

Question: When you became a part of this family, what were your expectations?

Comment:

I didn’t like her. She had a kid of her own and she favored her...and she like, let her get away with everything and if we had our toy and she wanted it, we had to give it to her. And my dad would make us do it too....I felt kind of unwanted

Question: How did your experience meet your expectations?

Comment:

Well, I did want to go and I thought well I’ll give him another chance, another chance, another chance. And I’m like that, I’m patient. He could change, but he didn’t. And the two years ago, I stopped trying anymore and I didn’t talk to him for two years. I didn’t want to.

Father's Relationship #2 – Re-partnering

Question: What were your expectations of this new stepfamily relationship?

Comment: Not told but pleased

He's with a new person now and she's really nice and she has a kid, the same age as my brother. A girl, _____. She's really, really nice. I get along with her good." I wasn't expecting anything, just meeting her (step-mom #2) for the first time and seeing if I liked her or not.

Question: When you became a part of this family, what were your expectations?

Comment: "I went down there and they were really nice. I liked them a lot ...I don't have any problem now. I'm actually talking to my dad right now."

Question: How did your experience meet your expectations?

Comment:

(My step-mom) treats me like her daughter. She takes me out shopping and stuff like that. She acts like a good Mom. She doesn't favor _____, she's good to me. I get along with _____. We call each other all the time. Like I call her my sister. She is my sister.

Mother's Relationship #1 – Re-partnering

Question: What were your expectations of this new stepfamily relationship?

Comment: "I was asked if I minded. I think they're still full of plans, like first meeting plans. Like still getting to know each other kinds, but they want to live together."

Question: When you become part of this family, what will be your expectations?

Comment:

Oh actually we are moving in with him at the end of the month....He's really nice. He'll do anything for my mom and he doesn't treat me and my brother like we're little things that are just in the way. He just doesn't want to spend time with my mom. He wants to spend time with us....(He's) like a parent to us.

Question: How did your experience meet your expectations?

Comment on experiences to date: "He calls to see if we're okay. If we're hungry he'll

say, 'Do you want to go for dinner or lunch or something like that.' He calls to see how we are."

8. Male – 12 years old

Father's Relationship #1 – Re-partnering

Question: What were your expectations of this new stepfamily relationship?

Comment: Told after the fact. No expectations.

Question: When you became a member of this family, what were your expectations?

Comment:

Not really (anything). The only reason I came down afterwards was to see my dad. I didn't like it. She was real mean. She always like, yelled at us a lot....like her parents and stuff, her mom treated me well (but) all her like relatives were weird and they acted really weird and stuff.

Question: How did your experiences meet your expectations?

Comment: "She really thought her daughter was an angel. I really didn't like her cause we always got in trouble for stuff we didn't do

Father's Relationship #2 – Re-partnering

Question: What were your expectations of this new stepfamily relationship?

Comment: (Not told until after the fact.) "Not really (anything). It happened during the summer. I was the first one to come down"

Question: When you became a member of this family, what were your expectations?

Comment: "Well we have to do the dishes, but that's about all and then we can go down there and fool around and stuff. And it's funner."

Question: How did your experience meet your expectations?

Comment:

Dad's nice (now) and we always do fun stuff and play baseball....She does the ball castle thing you jump around in. The Jumping Jamboree thing. Yeah, she

has four of them or something. She took me out lots during the summer break helped her with it and I got paid for it and stuff. So she was fair about that....(and) I've met her Mom and stuff. They were really nice.

Mother's Relationship #1 – Re-partnering

Question: What was your expectation of this new stepfamily relationship?

Comment: "She asked us if we felt okay about them moving in together. So yeah, I said it was okay."

Question: When you become a part of this family, what will be your expectations?

Comment:

I don't know. Uh, I dunno...we're moving. Sometime during this month, we're moving to a house in _____....He acts really nice....He like take us to the lake....He like does stuff with us and all the others didn't.

Question: So do you think that because they're committed that they want you to do something together? That it makes a difference?

Comment: "Yeah."

Question: How did your experience meet your expectations?

Comment on experience to date:

He like does stuff with us and all the other ones didn't. They just played like, you know sometimes for like allowance, if she gave us \$5.00, (he) would take us out somewhere to spend it. The other ones would just like say, here you go, and go.

9. Male – 12 years old

Mother's Relationship #1 – Re-partnering

Question: What were your expectations of this new stepfamily relationship?

Comment: "I knew him but I didn't know he was staying."

Question: When you became part of this family, what were your expectations?

Comment: "That he'd be nice like he was before he moved in."

Question: How did this experience meet your expectations?

Comment: “He was mean to me and stuff. I didn’t like him. He made me mad. He wouldn’t let me do things.”

#10. Female – 12 years old

Mother’s Relationship #1 – Re-partnering then Remariage

Question: What were your expectations of this new stepfamily relationship?

Comment: “I didn’t know about that.”

Question: When you became part of this family, what were your expectations?

Comment: “I got to know him after awhile and then I was comfortable with him....I trusted him.”

Question: How did this experience meet your expectations?

Comment: “I don’t mind my parents....My mom’s just plain embarrassing. Dad’s not bad...He’s better than my mom.”

Figure 6: Expectations of Live-in Relationships

Subject #	# of Stepfamily Unions	Told	Not Told
#1. 46 year old male	1	0	1
#2. 45 year old male	4	1	3
#3. 32 year old female	4	1	3
#4. 30 year old female	1	0	1
#5. 16 year old female	1	0	1
#6. 14 year old male	1	0	1
#7. 13 year old female	3	1	2
#8. 12 year old male	3	1	2
#9. 12 year old male	1	0	1
#10. 12 year old female	1	0	1
Totals	20 (100%)	4 (20%)	16 (80%)

Actual Stepfamily Experiences:

Participants came from a variety of socioeconomic levels and stepfamily patterns. Their experiences in a stepfamily also covered a wide range of issues, family groupings and relationship problems. Because of this, each participant's experiences was outlined separately. Fictitious names were used to ensure confidentiality.

Probe: What actually happened?

1. Male - 46 years old

John was raised in a permanent foster home from the time he was three months old. He had six foster siblings, five girls and a boy. The girls treated him well but he had issues, mostly sibling rivalry kinds of things, with his foster brother.

His experiences in this family were for the most part good. The one bad point was, if he was troublesome, his foster dad tended to discipline him physically or threaten to send him back. He was never sure how he had come to be in that particular place and no one ever explained this to him. It wasn't that he felt that he had been "played a bad deck". He just sensed that he didn't belong, and became unattached to the family emotionally.

In his early elementary years, he was introduced to his biological family and allowed to go on some weekends to visit. He didn't feel like he fit in and so decided, in his pre-teen years, to discontinue these visits.

After his foster dad died, (he was 11) things were smoother for John. He was

aware of his Mother being stressed, both from financial pressures and from loneliness and worried about that. He was also aware that she was seeing an old friend. They had many common acquaintances and went out together off and on.

He was not aware that they planned to marry. His first knowledge of this came when he overheard his mother telling his brother about it. She never did tell him. He wondered why he had not been told. He felt that he was old enough to be trusted with this information.

The major change for John was that his mother took over the role of disciplinarian and his new step-dad took on the role of gentle persuader and backer for his mother. John wasn't threatened or intimidated by this man. He didn't dislike him, but he wasn't looking for a father-son attachment. He was self-reliant by then, and had begun to bond with his brothers-in-law. It wasn't until his foster brother moved out that he began to know his new step-dad better.

When the family had a job related move three years later John, like a dutiful son, tried his best to make it a good experience. He began to make friends and fit in. The second move however, was disastrous. Being the only English kid in a French school was a very unhappy experience for him. He refused to go to school.

His mom, sensing his distress arranged for him to live with an older sister and go to school in his home-town for his Grade 12 year. He enjoyed this experience, developed strong friendships, and spent many happy hours helping his brother-in-law on his farm.

Although he had little direct interaction with them, from this time on, his relationship with his mom and step-dad was good.

2. Male - 45 years old

After a year of arguing and some physical abuse, Peter's parents had split up, without notice, leaving seven children (six boys and one girl), all under eleven, for the father to raise. The family was in constant survival mode.

Dad worked long hours in his business and this necessitated him having someone come in to stay with the children. The person he found was a simple ("only sophisticated at the thirteen year-old level"), emotionally needy woman-child. She came to house-keep for the family and stayed for four years. With no warning to the children, this woman had become "step-mom #1

This woman "assumed the role of a sibling who was trying to boss the house around". She "had extreme needs...(and) couldn't comprehend the big picture", so if she felt something should happen, e.g. Peter's dad should stay home with her, she would do whatever was necessary to make it happen. She had no idea of the consequences of her actions or that what she was doing might be hurtful or embarrassing to others. Peter found himself apprehending her or engaging in physical and/or verbal conflict with her (both publicly and privately), to protect his dad, his dad's equipment and the family's survival.

This union produced two additional children, both girls, and expanded the family's size to nine children and two adults

It was during the last years of stepmother #1's reign that Peter left to live with his biological mother in Victoria. He decided to go for all the right reasons:

- She was ill
- She was alone (without her children)
- He wanted to be there for her

but the move provided to be a poor choice for him personally. Mom was good to him and knew "her Mom stuff" but the school environment was tough and he was often alone while she worked. He played hooky and managed to get into some problems with the law (wrong friends).

Mom, and his new step-dad, were understanding, but told him he must make new friends. When he was unable to avoid all of his old buddies, they could no longer trust him and so began to take away his privileges. Peter decided to return home (Dad's).

When he returned, Step-mom #1 had been replaced and the new person in Peter's dad's life (again with no notice) was strong both intellectually and physically. She assumed the mother's role and during her time with the family brought "huge structure" and organization to both the family life and the business. Under her rule ("she took authority"), the family had a "golden" period. She bought three pieces of property for them and built up the business to a very satisfactory level.

All eight of the children, still at home, benefited from the structure and supervision of step-mom #2. Peter, although he "had contempt for her" as a stepmother, respected her for what she did for his dad. He learned many "lessons" from her and was

in awe of her physical prowess (She could lift heavy packages, build structures and play hockey). Her only major flaw was that she was married (no real relationship) to Jack, a very simple, crude man, who was later accused of sexually abusing some of Peter's sisters.

At age 18, Peter joined the army and while on duty, met and married his first wife. He was still away from home when step-mom #2 died. His dad was devastated by the loss of the "love of his life" and went on a heavy week-end drunk.

It was during this binge that he met step-mom #3. She had come to town "to put the make on another guy" but had met Peter's dad, found out he had money, and so went for him instead. She was extremely manipulative and cruel and believed in using other people for her own gain. It was the beginning of, as Peter phrased it, the "evil stepmother's" reign.

By the time Peter returned home they were married, and he was faced with dealing with yet another of his father's bad choices.

She, and her sons, stole from the family, ruined business equipment, overbought merchandise and in general put the family into bankruptcy within three years. "Her involvement had nothing to do with helping (the family to survive) and everything to do with making her in control and in command".

To make matters worse, Peter's dad had a serious heart attack and was hospitalized for bypass surgery. Because she was his wife, the bank gave Stepmother #3,

access to all of the family's financial resources. She moved through every area like a fatal earthquake. Family members who opposed her, or her 3 sons, were either manipulated out of the way, threatened, or physically punished, e.g., beaten with a bat or locked in the closet.

Peter had made a commitment to help his dad until he recuperated. He spent hundreds of hours trying to do just that, even though he was thwarted at every turn. The stress became unbearable and the rest of his siblings departed, leaving him to continue alone. He even invested his personal funds in to the business in a last attempt to save it. All to no avail. Eventually everything, including his own resources and his wife and child (divorce), was gone.

3. Female - 32 years old

Jane wasn't born when her family broke up. Her parents were just teen-agers at the time and already had a small son. Mom took the boy and moved back to her parent's home, without telling her partner that she was expecting a second child. Shortly afterward, she began a new relationship.

When Jane was just a 1 ½ years old, her father was killed in a car accident. He was still unaware of her existence. Some time later, that same year, Mom broke up with stepfather #1. As her own father's parents had not acknowledged her, Jane still wonders if this man was actually her dad and wishes that he was. If he were her father, she would then have a father AND a family.

When Mom became pregnant with a third child out of wedlock, her family forced her to marry the father. Jane was still very young (about 3) and was not told about the wedding. She has some pictures of them together but doesn't recall much about this relationship, except what her mother told her later.

This step-dad (#2) was a womanizer and thought nothing of sharing his marriage bed with other partners. The relationship was short-lived.

After the failure of her marriage, Jane's mother became involved with a hard drinking group of party types. Boyfriends came, and went, and a great deal of fighting, yelling, and drinking took place in the family home. It wasn't until Jane was 8 or 9 that her mother had another live-in partner. He just decided to stay and did.

This man was drunk all of the time. (Jane describes him as "Yuk".) One night when he came home drunk, he fondled Jane on the couch while she was pretending to be asleep. Jane never told her mom. She was afraid that her mom would be angry with her, or fight with her partner (they did this a lot), and perhaps be hurt. It wasn't until some time later that her older brother, who had seen it happen, told her mom. Mom ended the relationship.

After this experience, Jane's mom, who actually loved her children deeply, stayed away from live-in relationships. When she finally began to think about finding a new partner, it was with a "good man", who was not abusive and never drank. After a courtship period, they moved in together (to his home) and made plans for their wedding.

This time the children were consulted. Their new step-dad made them feel welcome by building extra bedrooms for them and treating them as his own. Seventeen years later, Jane still feels that he was the best thing that ever happened to their family. Because of him, her mom no longer drinks or fights.

Jane has recently started to call him “Dad” and wonders why she never thought to do so before. He is very proud to be known as her father and the Grandpa of her young children.

4. Female - 30 years old

Sally’s father had grown up in a family, in Norway, where alcohol, and physical cruelty, were an everyday occurrence. To escape this, he left home with only Grade 7 schooling. His life changed for the better after he married. His wife stayed home with their two children while he went to work as a postman. Both were content and very much in love.

When the youngest child was two, Sally’s dad began staying after work to play cards, and have a drink with his friends. This grew into an all night affair, and then into alcohol and drug use. He also started raising his own marihuana plants in the fields of their rented farm. Eventually, after fighting with him to change his ways, and having to suffer through several physical incidents, Mom decided to give him an ultimatum. The family or his plants. He chose the plants and left. Sally was glad to see him go. She would no longer need to protect her little brother from the fighting, or worry about her mother. They were divorced sometime afterward, with Mom gaining custody of the children.

Life after the divorce was still difficult. Mom struggled to feed the children with help from Social Services and what little she could make. Whenever she received her cheque, her ex-husband will arrive and threaten her, or fight with her until she gave him money to leave.

When both Sally and her bother were in school (her brother in Kindergarten and day-care), Mom was able to get a better job, working long hours caring for the elderly. It was here that she met her new husband-to-be. He arrived, from Canada, to visit his elderly grandmother, and fell in love with his grandmother's worker (Sally's Mom). During their courtship, Mom shared her fears with him and they plotted her escape, with the children, to Canada.

Without telling anyone, not even the children, they were married. Mom gave away or sold most of her things, told the children they were going to Sweden (to see relatives) and packed to leave. She desperately wanted to escape from her ex-husband, and knew he would follow her if he could.

During this period, her new husband would come to stay with the children while she was at work. They were still unaware of the marriage, but liked him for his caring, fun ways and for the fact that he tried so hard to please their mother. He was very different from their father.

It wasn't until they were on the boat to Canada that they were told everything. They had already learned to trust their new step-dad while he cared for them at the farm

and were pleased that he was to be a part of their life.

Life in Canada was difficult (educationally and financially) for them because of their language problems. The children received English language tutoring classes at school, but it wasn't until four years later that Sally felt totally at home in her new environment, and began to make close friends. Neither child missed their dad. Their step-dad and his parents became their family.

During her Grade 7 year, Sally accessed some counselling. The counsellor helped her to deal with her losses so that years later (age 20) she was able to seek out her Dad and ask him the questions she needed answered. He had not changed, and she left Europe feeling that her mother had made the right choice.

Her mother and step-dad have since separated but not divorced. They still care about each other, but Sally's mom has never addressed her grief over her lost first marriage, and needed the space to do so. Her step-dad misses his wife dreadfully and constantly inquires after her.

Sally had had to set some boundaries here. As she had married by this time, and now had a small child to care for, she could no longer carry the worry of her parents' issues. She was becoming too involved at the expense of her own family's wellbeing.

Sally, and her brother, both still see their step-dad often. They love him a lot, and call him Dad. He is the only father they have ever known or wanted, and the only Grandpa their children have ever known.

5. Female - 16 years old

Penny's mom died when she was 10 years old. Her parents had not been getting along well before her death (unexpected heart attack) but had remained together. Penny realized later, upon reflection of her life then, that her father had had a woman friend prior to her mom's death. She was sure that he had loved her mom, because he had been overwhelmed by grief at her funeral, and still didn't like to talk about her death.

Shortly after the death, Penny's dad introduced his new friend into the family by having her:

1. Prepare the family meals
2. Prepare the cake and goodies for Penny's birthday party.

This woman was never present when Penny got home but her father would mention her help and that Penny should call and say thank-you. When she did call, Barbara invited the family over for dinner with her and her two daughters.

Penny was pleased and excited by the visit and the opportunity to meet the 'friend's' daughters. During the evening, she made a positive connection with the youngest daughter.

Penny had never had an intimate friend before, and so expressed a desire to see this girl again. Her father was more than happy to arrange this meeting for her. Letting Penny feel that she was making the choice to be there, he slowly manipulated this desire, for a friend, into visitations and then into a live-in summer relationship.

When she realized what she had done, Penny felt extremely guilty for betraying

her mother so soon after her death..

Without ever acknowledging his intent to begin a live-in relationship, Penny's dad moved this person and her family into his family's home. Her brother (17 years old) was not fooled and would have nothing to do with his new stepmother.

At first this woman (Barbara) was extremely kind. She was essentially Penny's guardian angel and comforted her during moments of sadness over the loss of her mother. Once the relationship was firmly entrenched however, she began in little ways to put her own children first. This escalated, after the younger daughter (formerly Penny's close friend) made Penny cry so badly that her father insisted on knowing what was wrong and then intervened on her behalf. Barbara threatened that if Penny told on her daughter again, she would tell Penny's dad the things she knew about Penny. (Apparently her daughter had been telling her all the personal information that Penny had told her in confidence.) Later, when Penny argued with her step-mom, the opportunity came.

Pretending to be seriously upset by Penny's reaction to her, she sat down beside Penny's dad, and started to cry. He insisted on knowing what was wrong, and because of her dramatic performance, became furious and beat Penny severely on the back and legs.

The woman was sorry for what she had done and tried to stop him, but she couldn't. After that, Penny no longer felt that she could trust either her stepmother, or her daughter, with her personal information or concerns. She was no longer felt safe, or cared for, in her own home.

Things went from bad to worse. Penny decided to run away, but then changed her mind and returned home. When her dad asked why she was late, she told him. Instead of being sympathetic about her concerns, he embarrassed her by telling close family friends about it, saying that she was stupid to want to leave. After all, hadn't he given her everything. (monetarily, he was very generous.) He also, when asked about her bruises, covered up his actions by saying she had received them during Karate lessons. Penny was devastated by his actions.

There was never any private time to talk to her dad about her mom, discuss her concerns with him, or even get a hug from him. He always felt he must take his new partner along so she wouldn't feel left out. Penny did not want to share her private thoughts with Barbara and so they never talked.

Finally Penny decided she couldn't stand being sad any longer, she must leave. Her dad loved this woman and she shouldn't be the one to separate them. She didn't want him to be lonely because of her so she asked her dad if she could study abroad. He agreed.

She has now spent two years away from her home. She misses her family terribly but when she goes home to visit, nothing has changed. She is hoping that when she goes to University, next year, and is closer to home, her Dad will come to visit her, and they can finally discuss their loss and how Penny feels about her stepmother's actions toward her.

6. Male -14 years old (Very Gifted)

Don's mom became a cocaine addict when he was a toddler. By the time, he was 2 ½ years old; she and her husband had divorced and gone their separate ways. He tells me that most of the reason for her addiction, was her inability to cope with a very bright, severely hyperactive daughter. This need to get away from family stress led to partying with the wrong people, and becoming lost in a world of drug use.

Don was not told that his dad had found a new girlfriend (Mary), but he did see them together several times before he met her. Later he also visited with them.

His older sister (4 years old) was the first to move in with Dad and his new partner. Six months later Don also moved in.

In the six months (not yet three) he remained with his mother, Don's life was a series of attempts to survive. There was never any money in the house and food was scarce. He soon learned to 'hide food' under his bed for those times that his mother was incapable of looking out for him. His memories of that time, include long periods in a wet diaper, skirting needles (Mom had warned him of these when she was not under the influence), being hungry and searching the floors and tables, after a party, looking for something to eat. Although he was well cared for in his dad's home, Don's worries about food continued for many years thereafter.

Though he suffered through some traumatic events (guilt from his sister breaking her leg, and nightmares) without having his fears validated, the first few years with his new family were happy ones. Money was still scarce, but food, shelter and parental

attention, were provided.

At the age of 9, after two mutual children had been born into the new family, all four of the children were removed and put into foster homes. They remained in foster care until Dad had taken some anger management counselling (1-½ years later). Don and his stepbrothers returned home, but his older sister (a difficult child due to her energy level and behavior) remained in foster care.

While in foster care, Don had been able to laze around and just be concerned about his own needs. On his return home, he had to play an active part in helping with family chores, babysitting and mediating arguments between his younger siblings. Although he wasn't always thrilled about this, Don admitted that he preferred being back with his family and being expected to help out, to being in a foster home. He also said that he appreciated his new mom's efforts on his behalf and tried to assist her whenever he could.

With the birth of a third mutual child, there was less time and money to go around. Dad had moved to his parent's home, leaving the children with his partner (Mary). Dad still cared about his family and wanted to be with them, but was unable to support them financially. Mary was forced to seek financial assistance to keep the family together.

As he was a very bright child, and his stepfamily were not up to his intellectual level (brothers both learning disabled), Don often spent time alone in his room reading or listening to music. He really missed his one confidante, his sister. He expressed this loss

by stating that “it’s not too fun growing up without your big sister” and then told me how he felt about her never coming home again (Dad had given her up to care). He also stated that he didn’t talk about his feelings with his family. Having friends helped, but even with them (the ‘smart group’), he found it necessary “to explain his ideas and concerns, not just state them”.

The one bright spot in his life, that year, was his school wrestling team. This sport, which required a lot of energy, also helped to reduce his frustrations. The club, which was run as a ‘family’ that accepted and looked out for each other, gave him confidence in his ability to achieve his goals in life. He felt free to be himself with these people, and looked forward to the weekly sessions.

7. Female – 13 years old

Jenny was told that her family was breaking up (just prior to the event) and told that she must choose whom she wanted to live with. She decided to stay with her mother and have visiting privileges with her father. Moving preparations began at once with the long trip from Northern BC to Vancouver Island (their new home) scheduled to take place the next day.

Their first home was with an aunt. This was a fun filled time, very social and very enjoyable. It wasn’t until later, when they had moved to a place of their own; that the girl realized her mom was beginning to be interested in dating. As she still held out the hope of her family getting back together, Jenny did everything in her power to prevent this from happening. The resulting family confrontations, and frustrations,

escalated until Jenny, who was Grade 1 when her parents split, was in Grade 5.

Mom, by this time, was at a loss as to how to deal with Jenny without becoming physical. (She had already reached her frustration level several times.). She decided to visit the school counsellor and explain her frustration with her daughter's behavior to her. For the next two school years, the girl and her counsellor met on a regular basis. Sometimes they were joined, for after school sessions, by Jenny's mother.

At the same time as her behavior began to escalate severely at home, Jenny's teacher began to complain about the girl's behavior towards her peers. Jenny's hope of bringing her family back together and her frustration with seeing her dad in a new relationship had combined to make her a very unhappy child.

Added to this, was the fact that her dad's new partner treated her very poorly when she was at her Dad's. She openly favored her own child over Jenny and her brother, and seemed particularly intent on finding ways to aggravate her stepdaughter. She seemed to want Jenny to react in inappropriate ways. She even attacked Jenny's half-sister (Mom's child by a former relationship and Jenny's favorite person) and called her degrading names (a whore etc.). She went through Jenny's personal belongings, forced her to do a great deal of housework and punished her by grounding her without TV whenever her own child (aged 4) complained that she had done something to her. According to Jenny, her complaints were often fabricated as a way to get even for not being allowed to ransack the older children's personal items.

More difficult for Jenny to bear, was the fact that her dad supported his new partner in blaming Jenny and when she argued with him about it, he got physical or verbally abusive with her. She loved her dad, and so kept telling herself that he would change if she should gave him enough chances, but after 2 years with no evidence of any change, she gave up hope and refused to see him again.

Last July, Jenny's dad came to her mother's home and asked to speak to Jenny. He told her that he had broken up with the 'wicked stepmother' and was now with someone new. He brought pictures of this lady and her 12 year-old daughter for Jenny to see and asked her to come to his new home in Vancouver to meet them. He also promised a camping trip to her favorite park if she would come.

Jenny was curious about these new additions to 'her family' and so decided to give him one last chance. She bought some small gifts for her dad's new partner, and her daughter, and left for Vancouver to visit with them.

Jenny was pleasantly surprised by her reception, the attitude towards her by both mother and daughter, and by the fact that she immediately liked them both. She now looks forward to her visits, and talks to her new "sister" on the phone when she is not with them. She also feels that her dad has changed a great deal with this new commitment.

There are still some things, about her dad, that she would like to see changed and has told him so in no uncertain terms. He, unlike in previous times, now listens to her

complaints, comments on them and then tells her his decision. He also spends much more time with both his biological children and his stepchild,

During the following year, Jenny and her biological mother continued to build bridges in their relationship. Their communication improved and everyday life was much happier. So much so, that when Mom found someone she cared for, she felt comfortable in asking Jenny if she would mind if the family moved in with him.

Jenny had known this person for several months and felt that he was a good choice. He had demonstrated that he was unlike her mother's other "temporary" boyfriends, that he actually enjoyed his new role as part of the family and was concerned not only for his girlfriend's welfare but also for that of her children.

As I was completing my research, the family were house hunting and preparing for a September move.

8. Male – 12 years old

Mark, Jenny's (13-year-old female) five year old brother was not told that his parents were breaking up. He thought that his mother, sister and himself were leaving to visit relatives. He discovered after arriving at his aunt's home that they would not be returning to their former home.

Although he has some memories of the confusion generated by too many boxes of furniture all crowded into their first small home, most of his more vivid memories are from his older years and are associated with friendships that occurred at that time.

Previous to that he was a quiet child who did what his mom asked, was well-behaved at school and willingly went to see his father on holidays.

He developed into a more aggressive child in his Grade 4 year but it wasn't until His Grade 5 year when Dad began a long-term relationship with a lady Mark referred to as his 'wicked stepmother' (see definition) that school problems also surfaced.

He didn't like this woman or her small daughter. He was treated badly by the Mother, and her daughter, his stepsister, usurped his place as the 'baby' of the family. She was also given preference, over him, by his own father.

Angel could do no wrong in her mother's eyes and Mark and his sister could do no right. If he complained when she broke or hid his things, he was punished for not sharing with her. It was no use to object. It only made things worse.

Mark put up with the situation because he wanted to see his dad, and then took his frustrations out on his mother, when he returned home.

His mother had approached the school counsellor with her first concerns about Mark 's behaviour when he was in his Grade 5 year. Intervention had proven successful, so when problems began to escalate again in Grade 6, she referred him once more. Mark felt comfortable talking to the counsellor and was able to explain his feelings of loss and worked to resolve them with her. He also completed some sessions on alternatives and developing good strategies to use in negative situations.

Just prior to Mark's first year in Junior High, his dad broke up with his former partner and formed a new alliance. This woman had many positive parenting skills. She included Mark in the family outings (at his dad's home); introduced him to her own family and treated both he and her same age daughter equally. She showed that she liked him by asking him to join them on excursions and being okay with him coming to live with her, and his dad, when he entered high school.

Mark's dad also changed. He more willingly spends time with all the children in his family and discusses family issues with them. He was also excited about Mark's upcoming move to Vancouver.

Mark now looks forward to his visits at his dad's home. He likes his new stepfamily and has even begun to call his stepsister "sister". Things at home are much calmer too. His mother is just beginning her first live-in relationship. She discussed this move with both her children and they agreed that she had made a good choice.

After having had the time over the last several months, to get to know her new boyfriend, Mark feels very comfortable with the prospect of having him as a stepfather.

9. Male – 12 years old

Walter's family split-up when he was an infant and his older sisters were just 2 and 3 years old. Joint custody had been assigned by the court and because both parents wanted the children, this was a constant sore spot in parental post-divorce relations. For many years, their hostile comments to each other, made their children's lives miserable.

Counselling, first at the school level, and then through mental health as well, proved to be useful in alleviating some of the stress between the households, and in relieving the children of the messenger duties they had initially faced.

Neither parent re-partnered until the boy was in Grade 5 (now in Grade 7). At that time, Walter's mother had a short-term live-in relationship. Consequently, Walter had been both the 'man' in his mother's home and 'the baby' in both homes, for many years.

Walter and his sisters had enjoyed the company of Mom's new boyfriend, when he came for a visit. He was pleasant to them, and spent time playing games with them in the yard. They were not prepared however, for him to move in, or for the changes in their relationship with him, after he did.

The new relationship status was abruptly introduced to Walter and his sisters when they arrived home from school to find the boyfriend's belongings in the hall. Walter was surprised but said nothing. That night, while they were out for dinner as a family, it became apparent to him that this was to be a permanent thing. He admitted to me that he was not anxious to have a stepparent. He preferred to have Mom to himself.

Everything went well for the first week. After that, the new partner began to take over the primary parenting role by initiating changes in family routines, changes that had not been discussed with the children.

Mom operated a high stress business, and so was often very tired when she

arrived home in the late afternoon. It became her usual routine to take a short nap before dinner. The children had been allowed to wake her for the phone, go in to ask her important things or if they might visit with a friend.

Mom's new partner would not allow them to do this. If they disobeyed him and went in, or said they were allowed, he would become angry and put his face about 5 inches from theirs, yell at them, and accuse them of not caring about their parent's well being. The boy felt like his mother was being taken away from him.

When Mom was awake and okayed a trip to a friend's home, the new partner would interrupt and say that Walter couldn't go that night because they were going to do something as a family. Then nothing would happen. This occurred so often that Walter felt it was done on purpose.

The girls both argued with their stepparent, but Walter internalized his issues because as he told me, "He was kinda scary." Walter had never been yelled at, in his mother's home before, and the result of incurring so much of this new behavior was extreme anger and frustration.

Even Walter's cat felt the tension in the house. It took every opportunity to wet on Walter's stepfather's belongings (he even 'crapped' in his shoe). Previously, this pet had not gone to the bathroom in the house.

Walter's stepfather took the liberty of punishing the cat, when he could catch him, by rubbing his nose in his excrement and then kicking him (literally) outside. This

treatment of his pet, infuriated Walter. Soon he could no longer hold in his emotions and he began to erupt at school. If a peer as much as nudged him, he would explode physically and verbally. He was suspended several times for these incidents.

Arguments, between Walter's sisters and their new stepparent, and Walter's escalating problems at school, soon brought the conflict between her children and her mate, to Mom's attention. After discussing these issues with the children, and then with her partner, she realized that her new mate, in trying to protect her, had been isolating her from her children. A follow-up discussion with him, revealed that he had no intention, of changing his approach to the family. Mom quickly decided to end the relationship,

10. Female – 12 years old

Amanda's mother was in a live-in relationship when Amanda was born, but left her partner (Amanda's dad) shortly afterward. Amanda did not meet her dad again until she was much older, and has seen very little of him since then. Her biological grandparents do maintain a relationship with her. They have her over to their home periodically and give her presents on special days.

Mom remained a single parent until Amanda was 7 years old. During that time she had one boyfriend that the girl remembers, but this was not a live-in relationship.

Amanda stayed with her grandma, during her mom's working hours. She lived close by and provided a second home for both mother and child.

When Amanda was four years old, her mother introduced her to her present step-dad and his parents. They had just become re-acquainted after knowing each other in high school. Amanda liked him, but thought nothing more of it. Dating started some time later and it wasn't until Amanda was seven years old that the relationship became a serious live-in situation.

Her new step-father arrived without her prior knowledge. Amanda remembers being shocked and confused and wondering what this was all about. Slowly she learned to trust him and feel comfortable with his presence in her home. Her step-dad showed that he wanted her to be happy in her new family, by purchasing a home close to her maternal grandmother's house so they could remain connected to each other, refurbishing her bedroom and treating her as part of his family. His relatives were also pleasant to her and treated her fairly

The couple were married the year after their first mutual child (girl) was born. Their relationship had become stronger because of this child's health concerns and they felt committed to each other.

The little girl's illness brought extra attention to her from both her parents and her paternal grandparents. Amanda, because she had 'extra' grandparents of her own (her own father's parents) and a very committed grandmother, did not see this favoritism as a problem.

Three years later, a second mutual child (a boy) was born to the couple.

For the most part, Amanda found her step-dad to be fair. She demonstrated that she felt comfortable with him by calling him 'dad' or 'daddy', and informed me that he had recently built her a new, larger room and was soon going to paint it. Her major frustration with him involved the younger children. She felt that as they grew older (6 and 3 years respectively), they were allowed privileges that she had not enjoyed as a youngster, e.g., talking back.

She did have some complaints about her Mom however. They included Mom's habit of not giving her any freedom to shop for her own things; limiting her purchases to MUCH less expensive items than to those worn by her peers, and constantly embarrassing her in front of her friends (as a "fun" thing). Mom also promised her funds to spend and then would take the money from Amanda's savings account instead of her own.

Recommended Stepfamily Changes

Children:

1. Communication - Stepchildren want to be included in the family discussions, decision-making and problem solving. They want to know what is going to happen before the event not after it has taken place.
2. Status - Stepchildren want to be treated like a family member (of both parents in a stepfamily).
3. Favoritism – Stepchildren want their stepparent to be fair, and as much as possible,

treat all the children in the stepfamily as equals. They do not want the stepparent to set them up to be blamed and/or punished to protect their biological child.

4. Love your stepchild and let them know it.
5. Don't try to be a replacement parent.
6. Private time –Custodial parents should work to ensure that their biological children have one-on-one time with them. Children need to have and give affection (hugs, etc.) and often feel embarrassed to show this kind of affection in public.
7. Open visitation – Stepchildren want easy access to the non-custodial parent.
8. Be truthful/trustable –
 - a. Don't keep secrets from children. They deserve to know what will impact on their lives
 - b. Don't make promises that they will ultimately have to pay for, e.g., I'll give you \$10.00 and then take it from their savings instead of actually giving it to them.
9. Health and Safety issues - Show care and concern for the health of the children in their care. Don't make rules for others that you don't keep yourself, e.g., smoking.
10. Respect – a. Allow stepchildren to express their opinions, their side of an issue. Respect them as people, as you want to be respected.
 - c. Don't embarrass them in front of their friends, not even in jest. This constitutes a blow to their self-esteem at any age, but in particular in the Junior High years.

11. Independence and self-responsibility – Stepchildren need independence, responsibility for making choices and personal space. Little things, like allowing them to choose their own clothing gives the impression that you trust their ability to make the right decision and encourages self-reliance.

12. Open communication between biological parents. Don't use your biological children as 'messengers' or make them feel responsible for their parent's issues. They are children and can't solve adult problems.

13. Responsible parenting – Think of your family before yourself. Make sure they are well cared for and that you spend time with them. ("Sometimes as a parent, you have to slow it down and work harder...so something nice could happen to us.")

14 Protection – No betrayal by legal authorities. There needs to be fair legal decisions based on information given by the children. They should have a say in their destiny. It should not be left to others who wish to speak for them and then don't tell the judge what the child has actually said.

Figure 7: Children: Recommended Changes

Change	# of votes	Male	Female
#1	4	2	2
#2	3	2	1
#3	5	3	2
#4	2	1	1
#5	1	0	1
#6	1	0	1
#7	1	0	1
#8	2	1	1
#9	1	0	1
#10	2	0	2
#11	2	1	1
#12	1	1	0
#13	1	1	0
#14	1	1	0

Adults:

1. Communication – Adult stepchildren say that they would like to have been:
 - a. told things before they actually happened
 - b. included in family decision-making and problem solving.

2. Favoritism – Adult stepchildren thought that stepparents should try to erase preferential treatment of mutual and/or biological children whenever possible. They realized that this often occurs unconsciously, but felt that a definite effort would help to reduce it.

3. Treated like a family member – Stepparents should make a conscious effort to be as fathering (or mothering) as possible. They should include their stepchildren in family

outings; let them know that they are loved; and stress that a family means “leaving no-one out”.

4. Responsible parenting

- a. Assess family needs more appropriately instead of always being in survival mode.
- b. Teach your children to parent by providing them with appropriate models and opportunities for discussion of relevant issues.

5. Open communication and easy access – Stepparents should try to build a closer relationship with their non-custodial children.

6. Independence and self-responsibility – Adult stepchildren think that stepparents should allow stepchildren the right to voice their opinions, and the ability to make choices on issues relevant to them. They also stressed that biological parents in a stepfamily should not disregard the opinions of their own children in favor of those of an outsider.

7. Stepparents should work to make the home a calm, comfortable place where stress is kept to a minimum.

8. Stepparents should work to build a 50/50 relationship. There should be joint decision-making in parenting of mutual, biological and stepchildren.

9. Counselling – There should be access to counselling for all family members before, during, and after the initial family break-up.

Figure 8: Adults: Recommended Changes

Change	# of votes	Male	Female
#1	4	2	2
#2	4	2	2
#3	3	1	2
#4	2	2	0
#5	1	1	0
#6	1	1	0
#7	1	1	0
#8	1	1	0
#9	1	0	1

Category #4 – Additional Findings:

1. Biological parents often forget, in their moment of passion and excitement, to tell their children that they are considering a live-in relationship with another adult.

They also often expect their children to accept "That's how it is" as a reason for their inclusion in a stepfamily.

2. Children from broken homes may continue to hope, for an extended period of time, that their family will get back together. This is substantiated by the following comment given by a 13-year-old girl.

I was upset about it and for four years, I think it was. I still wanted my mom and dad to get back together. I just wanted them to be together so we could be a family, right? I didn't want her dating other people. It bothered me. And so, I was difficult."

Seeing their parent with a partner they can trust to care for them too, allows children to

release this hope and look at the relationship as a desirable change.

3. Children need to be able to access a trusted adult confidante, counsellor or an intimate friend. If one is unavailable, they may continue to grieve the loss of friends, family and home or internalize the anger and resentment they feel (from what they perceive to be unfair treatment in their new situation), for many years.

Comment: (16-year-old girl)

“I was so depressed I just didn’t want to do anything. (Anniversary of her mother’s death which happened at age 6)

Comments: (45-year-old male)

“It’s really tough for me to address that.”

“None of us have ever spent a lot of time, especially the older ones...Right now is about the most I’ve talked about this.”

Comment: 45 year old male

“Yeah, I never, I don’t think, have ever spent much time lamenting what or focussing or fixating on what, in any way, on the negative stuff that happened to me, because like even talking about, if I started telling you more stories”

Question: You still find that you have anger?

Comment: Very, EXTREMELY angry.

4. Stepchildren grieve a lost affectionate relationship (parent, sibling) for many years.

They may become depressed and lonely and/or carry a lot of guilt around the event of their loss.

Question to a 16-year-old who forgot her mom's birth date. - Can you forgive yourself?

Answer: "I can't."

They may also continue to pine for a relationship they never had and wished they could have had, i.e., and dead parent or lost sibling.

Comment from a 14-year-old male.

"It's not too fun growing up without your big sister."

5. Boys internalize their emotions. One example of this (by a 14 year old boy) follows:

I'll go up and I'll sit on the couch and I'll talk about something that happened or something that's going on, but it's never just sit down and explain how I feel. I don't like doing that. To explain how it looks or how I feel or stuff like that.

6. Stepchildren suggest that to be a successful stepparent, an individual should:

- Try hard to please her/his new partner
- Be affectionate with her/his new partner in front of the children. Show them that you are happy together
- Not be abusive or use threats and/or intimidation to end family issues
- Not misuse alcohol or drugs
- Allow the child to get comfortable with them and not expect an instant "I like you and want you as my parent" response. Children need time and space to become comfortable with any new person in their lives. Instead, a stepparent should just be themselves; friendly, relaxed and comfortable in their new role

- Treat all the children the same. Don't put your biological children at the top of every list
- Get the stepchildren something nice to demonstrate that you want them to like you
- Show the stepchildren that s/he think of them as part of your family. Invite them to meet your relatives and include them in extended family events.
- Care about her/his new family and not be afraid to show it. If uncomfortable with affectionate displays, a good stepparent shows s/he cares by her/his consideration of the stepchild's feelings, and by what s/he does for and with the stepchild.
- Be there for the stepchildren. Show your care and concern in positive inclusive ways. Be trustable.
- Spend time with ALL the children in the family and demonstrate her/his enjoyment at being with them.
- Communicate with their stepchildren. Treat them as responsible human beings and invite them to participate in family decision-making and problem solving.
- Allow stepchildren more self-responsibility and independence as they enter their teen years. Having the right to make independent choices is particularly important to the Junior High and/or High School student.

7. Children know who will stay ,i.e., who is committed to the relationship and will stay long-term if invited.

Comment: (32-year-old female)

“They were just there – just temporary baggage. They always drank and fought. It was not a relationship. I mean you could see they didn’t talk.”

Comment: (12-year-old male)

“My mom’s other boyfriends, they were all just big jerks....He acts really nice and the other ones, they didn’t care about us lot.”

8. When the stepparent does not try to be a replacement parent but just mothers/fathers naturally, without expectations that the gesture will buy her/him acceptance, the child is more likely to appreciate her/him as a person and become to call her/him mom/ dad.

9. A gradual move into a new stepfamily situation is best (“I met her often and I went over there often and so when I moved in, it was kind of like just a little bit of a bigger step,”).

10. Stepchildren want to be part of their own family (in which a biological parent is present) no matter what hardships exist. “I like the one I’m in right now except for the part where it got broken up for that year and a half (fostered at that time).”

11. Stepchildren clarified that parents and grandparents are not necessarily biological relations. They are instead, those people who care for you, and who are there to show you that they do, i.e., “the person who is in their life.”

12. Children will sometimes accept a new stepfamily situation because they admire and desire a friendship with one of the children of the new stepparent, e.g., “I get along with Jane...like I call her my sister”.

13. Very young children remember traumatic events and survival issues. The following examples were related to me by a gifted 16-year-old male:

- a. “I remember one time that my sister was jumping on the bed and I was reading this book and I set the book down and she jumped and she hit the book and broke her leg.” (Age 4 to 5)
- b. But I always had a problem with food because while I lived with my mom, we never really had money. She was a drug addict and so we never had money, so I had to scrounge for food and so I’d always keep food under my bed as a safeguard thing and then I sort of grew out of it. (pre-age 3 memories)

14. Gifted children often feel lonely in a stepfamily situation. Their siblings may not be functioning at the same intellectual level as they are, making it difficult for them to feel emotionally attached to stepfamily members. This can also occur in intact families or outside groupings.

Comment: 14-year-old male

“ I’ve noticed that even in my smart group (at school), I always have to go through things, like I can’t just say them. I have to explain them...(they) can’t even grasp some of this stuff.”

15. Having a caring, and supportive, outside group provides the emotional support that a child needs to feel secure in her/himself, and in the knowledge that things WILL work

out well for them during transition times.

Comment: (13-year-old female)

“Yeah, I think wrestling has helped a lot. Now I don’t have one family. I have two”.

16. After a family break-up and/or during times of tension between parents, a child may be used as a confidante, or intermediary. This often creates a loyalty conflict within the child (regardless of their age).

Comment: 30-year-old female

“Dad, if you’ve got a question, you’ve got to ask her. You can’t get me in the middle.”

17. In step-families (as in some intact family relationships), family issues were kept private from outsiders, even very close friends.

Comment: (16 year old female)

“they don’t know the family problems, right. They just know what’s outside. And they are such close friends.”

18. Adults who need to control, when in competition for control with their custodial child, or stepchild, will resort to degrading comments towards the child, or physical violence, to win.

19. Parents, and stepparents, to protect their public image from being scarred by the behavior of their child, or by their behavior towards the child in a moment of frustration, will lie, blame the child or embarrass the child in front of others, to vindicate or cover-up their role in a given situation.

Comment: (16 year old girl)

“But like, all the bruises on my legs. I did karate, you know, so he’s like, you know, some friends ask what was that and my dad says, “Well it’s the karate.”

20. Stepchildren are accepting of physical punishment if they feel it was deserved and if the parent who delivers the punishment has shown in other ways that they care for the child.

Comment: (45-year-old male)

“Dad had a huge temper. If I did something stupid, he kicked me in the thigh.”

Comment: (16-year-old female)

I know you might think my dad’s like abusing me or something. I don’t think so. It’s just like the way it is in our family. He and my mom just used to slap me just because I’ve been bad so, I mean it’s not a good thing that he beat me up

21. Stepchildren who have been emotionally hurt in a trust relationship, lose their ability to trust others. They just “don’t want to be hurt again”. They also run away either physically, or mentally, to avoid being hurt. They may:

-Actually leave home (“I live with my stepmother so I don’t want to be there.”)

-Sacrifice their own happiness for those they love. They rationalize their loss of home and family by telling themselves that it allows others to be happy.

My dad can’t keep staying alone for the rest of his life because my mom died. I think, well okay, she loves my dad. My dad loves her. So I can’t say, you know, like I don’t like her, so I don’t want you to be with her. I want him to be happy too. So at the same time I think, I’ll just go alone.

-Not trusting other stepfamily members (afraid of being used again)

-Not communicating their hurts to parents or others

-By always being afraid that new people in their lives will let them down

or not be what they seem to be

And I'm always scared of something. If I meet a friend, you know like a guy, a boyfriend, I'm always scared that he will lie to me. Like he's gonna not be the person that he seems to be. Like if he's really nice, I'll say, "No, he can't be THAT nice." Well, I don't know. I'm just always scared.

22. Stepchildren will suffer in silence during their assigned time with a parent who has re-partnered, and then take out their pent up anger and frustration on the custodial parent, or their school peers. This seems to be especially true if the custodial parent is a single parent.

Comment: (12 year old male)

"Like when we came back from there, we just had a really bad attitude. We were sick of her (the stepmother)."

23. Stepchildren put themselves under extreme stress to protect those they care about.

Comment:

I made a choice. I made a commitment to help my dad. My dad had made this incredibly bad choice of this woman and I have to deal with her and it's like, might be like trying to hold on to a bee's nest and not get stung.

Question: Why didn't you just throw it away?

Answer: "Because Dad wants it."

Question: So Dad is important?

Answer: “Yeah. Of course, it was important. I was the last of the boys, the older boys, who was capable of helping him.”

24. According to the stepchildren who volunteered for this project, a ‘wicked stepmother’ is ‘real mean’, always yells at you, seems to be at you all of the time, favors her own child in every situation and punishes the stepchildren for her own child’s transgressions. She does not allow stepchildren to state their own opinions or explain her reasons for her actions to them (Do as I say not as I do, or else.) Also a ‘wicked stepmother’ will expect more effort, with less reward, from her stepchildren, will be verbally and sometimes physically cruel, will set them up to be punished and will use name-calling, manipulation and put-downs (of them or those they hold dear), in order to be in control.

25. A stepchild will sometimes not report physical/sexual abuse, by a stepparent, to the custodial parent, if they are unsure of the ramifications of that information on their relationship with that parent.

Comment: (32-year-old female)

He came home drunk and he fondled me on the couch. I was so afraid to wake up cause I didn’t know how he’d react cause Mom and him would fight and punch each other in the mouth....Well I shut it off for a long time until my brother finked. He saw it happen and he finked.

26. Adult stepchildren work at incorporating into their stepfamilies, the things they missed the most in their own stepfamily experience.

Comment: (46 year old male)

I made a conscious effort to be as fathering as possible because I thought this would be acceptable both to my stepchild and to his mother. I watched for

reactions to what I was doing and used this reaction as a measuring stick. I felt I was more aware of what to look for and what to attempt because of my own experiences with these types of relationships.

27. Adult stepchildren realize that they may also have been guilty of showing favoritism to the mutual child of their new union.

Comment: (46-year-old male)

“He may have been given preferential treatment. It wasn’t done consciously but there was a high probability that it did occur.”

28. Adult stepchildren pattern their lives, most often unconsciously, after parent role models (especially those they see as strong individuals).

Example: Marriage pattern #1

Custodial Parent #1

1. Married to a woman not his

Intellectual equal – divorced

2. Relationship – committed

with a challenging vibrant woman

3. Married to a greedy, very self-centered partner

Adult Stepchild #1

1. Married to a woman not his

intellectual equal – divorced

2. Relationship with a non- caring self-centered partner

3. Married – committed relationship with a challenging, vibrant woman

Business Pattern #1

Self-employed

Business a priority

Family second

Self employed

Business a priority

Family second

Marriage Pattern #2

Biological Parent – Foster Child

Adult stepchild #2

1. Divorce then remarriage

1. Divorce then remarriage

Foster Parent of stepchild #2

1. Death then remarriage

Business Pattern #2

Biological Parent: long-term employment

Long-term employment after

Foster Parent: long-term employment

initial short-term employment

after initial short-term positions

Gender roles:

Grandmother – Babysitter

Adult stepchild #3

Tutored – Women do for men

Accommodating to partners

Boys play while girls clean

Comment: “I had to do everything. My brothers had to do nothing. That was my grandma’s motto, you know, that women do for men. Men don’t do for women though....That’s what I do for_____.”

Accommodating behavior is slowly fading now that this female is in a committed relationship and feels that she won’t lose her partner if she expresses her feelings.

Comment: “I make _____ help me now.”

Question: Would you have done that with _____ before you were married?

Answer: “No.”.

Figure 9: Additional Findings

Findings	Subject Votes	Male	Female	Adult	Child
#1	10	5	5	4	6
#2	1	0	1	0	1
#3	8	4	4	4	4
#4	5	2	3	1	4
#5	4	4	0	2	2
#6	7	3	4	3	4
#7	7	3	4	3	4
#8	7	3	4	3	4
#9	5	2	3	3	2
#10	3	1	2	2	1
#11	5	2	3	3	2
#12	2	0	2	0	2
#13	5	2	3	1	4
#14	1	1	0	0	1
#15	3	1	2	1	2
#16	2	1	1	1	1
#17	4	2	2	2	2
#18	5	4	1	4	1
#19	2	1	1	1	1
#20	3	1	2	1	2
#21	5	3	2	3	2
#22	3	2	1	0	3
#23	5	2	3	3	2
#24	4	2	2	1	3
#25	2	1	1	2	0
#26	3	2	1	3	0
#27	3	2	1	3	0
#28	3	2	1	3	0