

# BEING A STEPPARENT

Taking on the responsibilities of a stepparent and adopting the traditional role of mother or father, often does not work very well.

The primary challenge for a stepparent is to develop your own unique role that works both for you and the family.

This will also depend on the ages and personalities of the children in your stepfamily and the time you get to spend together.

What is absolutely essential is that you and your partner role model a loving, respectful and emotionally secure relationship for the children.

Couples need to make time for their relationship and have couple-time on a regular basis. Yes, this can be difficult but this helps build stronger bonds as a couple, as a family and also benefits the children. Along with patience and open communication this will help build a successful stepfamily.

## REMEMBER

- » The road to being a well-functioning stepfamily is a winding one, and on this trip you will all need emotional stamina, humour and endurance.
- » Stepfamilies are different to nuclear families. Their foundations are different with careful reconstruction and negotiation of roles and responsibilities often required and the consideration of both past and current relationships, but many people achieve it successfully.

Being a parent is the hardest job in the world, but being a stepparent throws in a whole new set of **challenges.**



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- » Being a stepparent generates varying emotions and expectations (at times exciting and rewarding) and can test our patience and character. Be aware of these feelings, the ups and downs; satisfaction, isolation, powerlessness, anger, pride, sadness, hope, guilt, jealousy and frustration. Talk to someone or get some support about your feelings.

**Feelings are temporary and they do pass.**

- » It takes time for your stepfamily to develop its own routines and traditions. It can be helpful to make some rules or guidelines with your partner about your active involvement with the children (e.g. homework, discipline, providing transport etc.) and when you will stay in the background as a support.

## LET'S GET PRACTICAL

### SUPPORTING THE CHILDREN

- » Be the support but not the disciplinarian (unless there's no other option) and let the biological parent discipline their children. Research confirms that this is what children want and expect from their parents.
- » Ask for respect, but be prepared to be treated differently. Don't expect an immediate bond, it can take months and years, just try to accommodate, understand and communicate openly. Patience, good-will and humour is necessary.
- » Consider the children's ages, where they are at, what is appropriate and a potential common interest or activity. Do some research or speak to a professional and remember time, interest and effort is the key in developing your relationship with them.
- » Sit down with the children to discuss and decide together how you will address each other. Don't expect them to call you "Mum or Dad." Let them know you are not there to replace their other parent, but you will be there to support and guide them whenever they need you.

- » Allow children to have alone time with their parent, whilst you take some time out for yourself and your own interests.
- » Try not to get caught up in heated arguments, particularly with adolescent step children which is accepted a difficult time for all concerned. Walk away, and with your partners help resolve the situation by discussing it together at another time.

### SEEKING MORE INFORMATION OR HELP

- » Prepare yourself for becoming a step mum or dad, educate yourself about the realities of this role. It can bring untold joy and lifelong relationships even though it's undeniably difficult at times. Read books or do a stepparent program, it can make all the difference.
- » Seek support. Join a face to face or online group so you can talk to others in the same situation. You are not alone, there are many who have experienced the same as you.
- » See an experienced practitioner that is familiar with stepfamily dynamics. They can support you and your relationship and help build your communication, emotional and parenting skills.

### Where to access further information or assistance:

#### Stepfamilies Australia

[www.stepfamily.org.au](http://www.stepfamily.org.au) or at 03 9639 2576

**Family Relationships Advice Line** 1800 050 321

**Lifeline** 13 11 14

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

**Kids Helpline** 1800 55 1800 or [www.kidshelp.com.au](http://www.kidshelp.com.au)

**My Mob App** – positive family-based app and communication tool to help you stay connected no matter where your family members and children – go to [www.mymob.com](http://www.mymob.com)