



Stepfamilies

What is a Stepfamily?

When a parent marries a second time or lives with a new partner/girlfriend/boyfriend.

This can happen because of divorce, separation or even a death and with time, a new partner is found.

The new partner may have children. Your children and their children may live together in the same house.



How do the children feel?

Some children are very happy with a stepfamily.

Some children do not want a stepmother or stepfather. They do not want stepbrothers or stepsisters. It can be difficult and lonely.

The child can become depressed, stressed and unhappy at home and school.

Be patient! With time, the child may become happier. They need time to become friends with the new stepfamily.

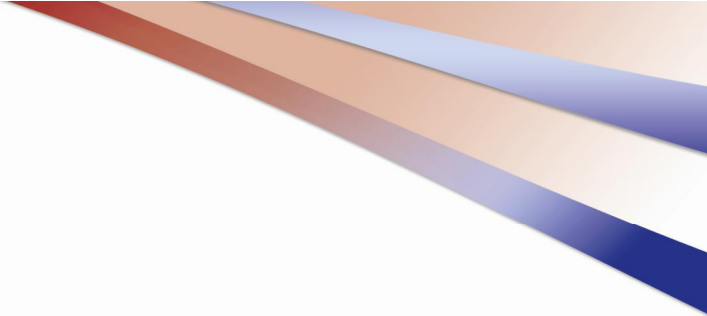
Remember, it is important that the child has contact with both his/her natural Mum and Dad.

Worries

With a new Stepfamily the child needs time to learn new routines.

A child may be thinking or worrying about:

- Do they like me?

- 
- What food do they like?
 - Are they strict or relaxed?
 - What religion do they follow?
 - When do I do my homework now?
 - Am I allowed to watch TV? Use the computer?
 - That's different from before! Why?!
 - Do I have to share a bedroom?

No family is perfect immediately! Time is needed to learn about each other. Holidays like Christmas or Eid etc. can be especially difficult if routines are changed. Be patient.


Change can upset children. A new step-parent can mean:

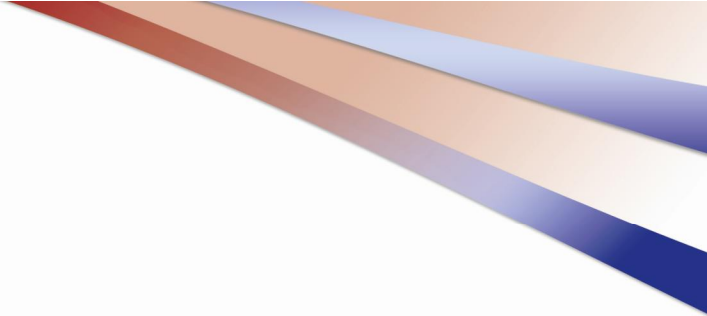
- Moving house
- Moving school
- Moving area
- Sharing a room with a stepbrother or stepsister (less privacy)

Your child needs time to accept this. The step-parent needs time to accept the new child too.

Steps to a successful stepfamily

If your new family is to be happy, you need to think about:

- How the relationship with the natural parent ended
 - When and how the new stepfamily meet the child/children
 - What are the needs of the child/children?
- 

- 
- What are the needs of the stepparent?
 - Are you patient?

It can take days or years for a stepfamily to become a happy family.

With time, activities, holidays, experiences and memories will be shared. This will help you create a happy family.


If you have a second chance at happiness with a new partner – take it.

With love, understand and patience you will have a happy family.

Stepfamilies – how to connect

A stepchild can be a baby or forty years old. They might love you or hate you!

How do you connect with them?

- **Everyday care and help.** With babies, change nappies, give feeds to get up in the night.
 - **Play.** Play games and have fun.
 - **Shared activity.** Baking, shopping or gardening together. Ice-skating or bowling with a teenage may seem scary, but if you look silly doing it, this can be fun! A bond will develop in time. You will also find out what they are good at.
 - **Talk about the natural parent.** If the stepchild seems unfriendly, talk with them about the missing parent, ask them to think of you as a friend rather than a parental figure.
 - **Never give up!** Be friendly and patient and make sure your partner supports you.
- 



Step-parents and Parents

An important relationship – you and your partner's ex.

If this is good it can help with the stepchild. If this is bad it can make it hard for the stepchild.

Try to be polite and friendly to your partner's ex.

NEVER complain about your partners ex to the stepchild or in front of the stepchild. This will upset them and damage your relationship.

Step-parents and Disciplines


If the stepchild is naughty then you must discipline them. Sometimes, if this child's parents have died, divorced or separated the children can be naughty for a while. This is because they are upset or worried.


- Have house rules which everyone follows, children and adults.

Example:

If the stepchild says: *"You are not my parent"*.

You say: "Yes, I am not your parent but you must follow the house rules".

- Work together. Try and get your partner to discipline the child and always support them.
 - If you do not agree with your partner, discuss it in private, not in front of the child.
 - Never support the stepchild and not your partner. This is not good for your relationship or your partner's authority with their child.
 - Listen to the stepchild if they are upset but do not support them against their parents. The parents and step-parents are adults and must support each other.
 - Be fair to all the children, do not have favourites.
- 

- 
- Spend time with your kids on your own; let them know they are still special to you and haven't been "replaced".
 - Don't spoil a child; even if you feel guilty about breaking up his family.
 - Stay calm. A stepchild can be horrible to the stepparent. It is because they are upset at the new situation. Be patient.

Stepfamilies and Surviving

Having stepchildren can be hard work but rewarding.

Stepchildren have suffered a loss. One parent has disappeared due to death, divorce or separation.

The new family will not be the same as the old one.

- Parent-child relationships were formed before the new couple relationship.
- There is often a birth parent elsewhere. They still have still have power and influence.
- Often stepchildren have two homes and rules and behaviour may be different in the two homes.
- There is little 'legal' relationship between step-parents and stepchildren.

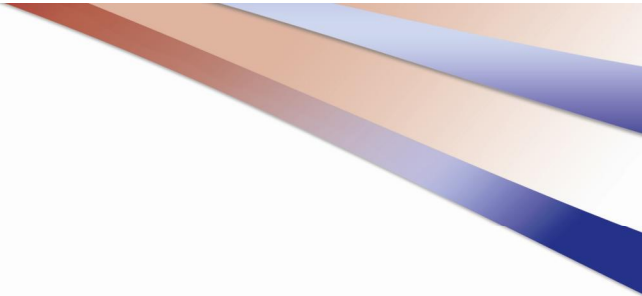
A new couple feel very in love. The children and stepchildren do not.

You chose your partner and they chose you. The children and stepchildren did not.

The stepchild may be unhappy their parent has a new partner. Your children may be unhappy you have a new partner.

Ways of helping children cope better

- Encourage the children/stepchildren to express their feelings.
- 

- 
- Accept their feelings, for example:
"I can see how hard this is for you."
"I understand how angry/upset you are"
 - Talk as a family – adults and children together
 - As the step-parent, praise and encourage
 - Get to know them better.

You and your new partner must discuss:

- How your lifestyles differ.
- The similarities and differences in your views on parenting and family rules/expectations.
- Can your new partner discipline your children? If yes, how and when?
- What effect will your remarriage/partnership have on your children's relationship with their other parent?
- Do your children and partner like each other? If not, what do you need to do to improve things?
- How will money be handled? Including supporting dependent children, paying maintenance, making a will.
- How will you make time both for the children AND to enjoy your new couple relationship?

Be confident!

**Step-families can and do work, and be wonderful experience
for everyone**