



Did You Know...?

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About Step-Parenting

Parents Reaching Out connects with families, schools and communities in New Mexico. We offer information from many reliable sources. We thank the Parent Education Network, a project of Parents Helping Parents of Wyoming, Inc. for permitting us to share their PEN Notes publications in this information series.

Step-families are formed whenever parents remarry. Approximately 1.5 million people remarry each year, which is almost one out of two marriages or 4.8 per thousand. Ninety percent of divorced women with children remarry, with even more divorced men remarrying than divorced women. Forty percent of all children will end up in a step-family before they reach 18 years of age. There are more than 35 million step-parents in the United States. When a second marriage fails, issues involving children often cause the break-up.



Guidelines for Step-parents:

- Be yourself (your own actions are your best defense)
- Be a spouse first and step-parent second (your first responsibility is to yourself, then spouse, then stepchildren)
- Be honest (love and affection take time to develop)
- Assert yourself (ask for 100% acknowledgment as step-parent)
- Define your limits (this is the role I play)
- Risk asserting authority (a joint effort on parenting)
- Be open to compromise (children need space and freedom)
- Be honest with yourself before marrying a person with children (if you don't want to be a step-parent don't sign on)

- Ask for understanding and venting time (you need a sounding board)
- Learn secret codes of appreciation
- Be realistic about the past (accept the past and don't make it an unmentionable subject)
- Question your reasons for wanting a child (remember, a child needs two loving parents with a warm and secure home)

Guidelines for Step-family Planning:

- Seek professional help (don't hesitate seeking professional help before or during the marriage)
- Attend step-parenting courses if possible (this promotes cohesive step-family relations)
- Get support (join support groups)

A "couple bond" or strong, healthy relationship must be firmly seeded between a parent and step-parent to avoid family problems or wedges driven between them.

Characteristics of a Successful Remarriage:

There is no such thing as instant love. Time is needed to grow and mourn the past family unity. "We are one big happy family" is often the unresolved past loss and a set-up for failure and disappointment. Respect one another and take the time to *like* before loving. These bonds take 2-3 years to establish and stabilize the family.

Disciplining a Step-child:

- Be specific. Give clear, precise directions.
- Be prepared to follow through to let the children know that you really mean what you say.
- Discuss discipline early in the relationship.

Disciplining the Adolescent Step-child:

- Don't discount. Value what the adolescent says and allow him to be wrong. If he is angry, acknowledge it and don't tell him not to be.
- Be open and honest with feelings and emotions and leave room for disagreement. Respond literally to what is said. Make adolescents think and say what they mean.
- Be direct and assertive.
- Use "I want" instead of "you should" messages.
- Get adolescents to think as adults. Straight and direct questions hook the adult in the adolescent, i.e. "How will you solve your problem?"



For Parents of Children in Step-families:

1. Be perceptive and consider the child's past and the roles they played in their previous families and single-parent families.
2. Use discretion and don't put down the children's parents or share negative feelings or comments with them unnecessarily. Learn to tune in to your child's feelings rather than just the content of your child's message.
3. Plan how things are to be done in the new stepfamily system instead of waiting until everyone is confused about how things are to be done.
4. Deal effectively with coping mechanisms by first recognizing them and teaching children more appropriate ways of dealing with stress, such as talking, expressing negative and positive feelings and asking for help.
5. Provide reassurance and be there for them when they need you. Be the consistent, stable parent in the child's life.
6. Form a united front and be a parenting team.

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