

Step & Blended Families - National Families Week

It is very clear that step or blended family life is almost inevitably complex, and hugely challenging. Many adults embarking on these new arrangements may be unaware of the challenges that may present. However stepfamilies adopt some new strategies, they have the greatest chance of successfully navigating family life.

Here are some suggestions to help you address the challenges of living in a stepfamily:



Resolve to co-operate with your former partner

Now is the time to 'bury the hatchet' and let go any of old grudges and bitterness with your former partner. Your children need to feel safe and loved. Put aside any differences you may have and focus on the children's well-being first.

Talk to your children directly

Tell your children what is happening and why. How you tell them will vary according to their ages and comprehension, but keep it simple and do it without drama. Encourage your children to talk to you about their fears or worries (even relatively small worries like whether or not they can continue to afford to go to soccer or water polo can build up to breaking point in a child's mind), but don't push for confidences.



Spend quality time with children

Whilst it is great to spend time doing family group activities, parents should also make time for one-to-one check-ins with their biological children, to allow them to feel valued and cared for. Stepparents need to remember that children may need more time and support from their biological parent at certain times, and must not get into a competition for time and attention from their partner. Don't see this as a threat to the couple relationship. Allow the child one on one time with their parent.





Leave all disciplining to the biological parent

Parents and stepparents should agree on rules together behind closed doors. It is best that the biological parent then conveys the rules to the children, with the stepparent supporting. The most successful stepparent-stepchild relationships are where the stepparent strives to develop a warm, friendly way of relating with the child.

Maintain boundaries around your curiosity!

Never pump your children for information about your former partner's lifestyle. Children must feel the love they receive from both parents is unconditional and not dependent on giving the "right" or "wrong" answers. Discourage children's attempts to gain approval by telling tales and acting as a spy.



Discuss problems away from the child

If you are concerned about any problems arising from access visits or indeed any matter relating to the wellbeing of your child, discuss them with the other parent away from the child. The worst thing for your children is to witness open conflict between the two people they love most, especially if it appears they have been the cause of the conflict.



Learn more

Having read some of these tips, you may be realising just how complex life in a stepfamily can be. If so, try and learn more. In the long run it may save your new relationship and your family a lot of stress and it could increase your chances of enjoying a happier family life.



As we journey through these challenging times, please reach out for support. You can call Relationships Australia WA on 1300 364 277 or visit www.relationshipswa.org.au

Education – We run [courses & workshops](#) which teach strategies to assist parents in a stepfamily.

4families – If you live in Albany, Bunbury, Busselton, Cockburn, Kwinana, Mandurah, Manjimup, Margaret River or Rockingham you can get free support through our 4families service.

4Dads – The 4Dads program offers information, education, referrals and support for fathers of children up to 18 years in the Mandurah and Pinjarra areas.