

Stepfamilies

Building a new family is an exciting challenge. It takes lots of time, energy and hard work. There are many different kinds of stepfamilies and each will have different strengths and problems to overcome.



Starting a stepfamily

- * Don't expect your stepchildren to love you, but do expect them to respect you, as you respect them.
- * A new partner can't suddenly become a new mother or father. Parenting will still need to be done by the children's birth parents if they are still involved.
- * There may be difficulties with the children's other parent about arrangements for ongoing contact with the children.

Don't underestimate how difficult it is to build a complicated new family. It takes years, not months, and lots of effort.

What parents can do

- * Keep changes to a minimum. It can be a lot for children to manage when homes, schools and friends all have to change.

- * Talk to your child and partner about your plans.
- * Tell your child it will be strange at first, but in time they will get used to the changes.
- * Listen to your child's feelings.
- * Never speak badly of a child's parents in front of them, even though this may be hard.
- * Understand the strong bond between your new partner and their child. Make time for them to be together.
- * Make time to spend with your own child if you have one.
- * Try to find a new place to live so it is a new beginning for everyone. It will be harder for everyone to feel they belong if you live in the home of one of the previous families.
- * Decide that, unless a child is very young, each parent should discipline their own child and not expect their new partner to do it, especially at first.

REMINDERS

Stepfamilies are usually decided by two adults who want to be together. The child may not share the same feelings.

Never fight in front of your child or stepchild.

Make time for your partner.

Keep your own individual interests as adults and support the different interests and activities of each child.

Every family and stepfamily is unique. What works for some may not work for you.

Be honest about your feelings and sensitive about how you express them.

Listen to the feelings of all the others in the family.

Stepfamilies are complex, but they can be rewarding when they work.

If you need help, call Relationships Australia on 02 9418 8800 or 1300 364 277 or Centacare Relationship Counselling on 02 9390 5366.