

Portrait of a

Stepfamily



Tips for a Successful Stepfamily

For Helpful Resources:

- ◆ **Stepfamily Foundation** - www.stepfamily.org If you click for "Free Information" it lists 10 steps for step-dads and step-moms, kids, young mothers, and grandparents (among others) to help form healthy stepfamilies. It offers online counseling, questions and answer areas, and other links.
- ◆ **Stepfamily Association of America**, www.steptogether.org, **Stepfamily Living** offers resources and related web links.
- ◆ **Stepfamily Living** offers Chat rooms and well-organized message boards for peers to provide support and advice to one another.
- ◆ **National Stepfamily Resource Center**— www.stepfamily.com The National Resource Center's primary objective is to serve as a clearing house of information, resources, and support for stepfamilies.



www.wyofams.org
1-866-WYO-FAMS



We know that these are stressful times for families and many families wrestle with time, money, and emotional demands. Sometimes homes become the place where everyone is worn-out, emotionally drained, or even angry. In spite of these difficulties, there are ways to keep our families strong and happy. It is our hope that you will find this brochure not only informative but helpful in your daily lives.

The Wyoming Healthy Marriage Initiative wants to help.

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Tips For A Successful Stepfamily

Ease into the stepparent role;

be flexible and patient. Try to build and maintain a friendship and support role with your stepchildren before parenting them. Bonding in stepfamily relationships can take years to occur, so patience is important in a stepfamily.

Hold family meetings

on a regular basis to give all family members a chance to share their concerns about relevant issues or to help make family decisions. Children will be less likely to resent their responsibilities in their new family if they have participated in the decision-making process.

Be sure to discuss rules,

methods of discipline, and other important issues with your new partner. Communicate these expectations and “household rules” to the children so everyone understands. Until the stepparent-stepchild relationship is stronger, discipline will be more effective if the biological parent disciplines and the stepparent plays a supporting role. It is very important that the two spouses present a united front to the children and work together in discipline matters.

Nurture the couple relationship.

It is important to continue to build your new relationship with each other by spending time together without the children, being honest and open with each other, and practicing good communication skills. Often seeking outside help, through a marriage support group or stepfamily support group, proves extremely effective in building a strong couple relationship.

Establish new traditions. Family traditions help create a sense of identity and solidarity among family members. Some traditions from previous families have their place for the sake of familiarity and stability, but over time new family traditions can be incorporated into previous family traditions or separated so that each “family” brings some of their history into the new tradition.

Find activities that the entire family can enjoy together. Participating in enjoyable family activities helps members get to know each other better, strengthens family bonds, and creates lasting memories. Allow all family members to assist in planning the family activities so they have some ownership.



Encourage everyone to contribute their ideas based on their preferences.

Encourage all family members to spend time together one on one.

Children need to spend alone time with both their biological parent and their stepparent. Spending time with the biological parent allows the child

to feel important despite the family changes. Spending time with the stepparent helps the child grow to respect and trust the stepparent.

Assure children that love is bountiful.

Just as you can love your biological children and your stepchildren, their care for a stepparent does not negate their love and care for their nonresidential parent.

Accept the child's other biological parent.

You don't have to like the child's other parent, but do not criticize the other parent in front of the child. Children see themselves as extensions of their parents. If you say hurtful things about a former spouse in front of child(ren), they are very likely to believe the same about themselves. You cannot erase the bond between the child's other parent and the child and failing to accept the other parent will lead to conflict, misunderstanding and hurt.

Try to learn as much as possible about child development and effective parenting,

especially if you have no biological children. Join support groups, participate in parenting classes, or read books.

This resource has been adapted from a packet entitled "Premarital Expectations: A Guide for Living in Stepfamilies," by Marilyn Coleman and Jill Hastings.