

# STEPFAMILIES

## Tasks for Stepfamilies to Accomplish

The "bottom-line" task for all stepfamilies is to establish a new family identity. There are a number of tasks that need to be accomplished in order to do this. Some tasks are more difficult and take more time, even years, to accomplish.

### **1. They must deal with loss and change.**

- Each person in the new stepfamily experiences loss since all change involves letting go of something.
- Some strategies:
  - Identify losses for all individuals.
  - Support expressions of sadness.
  - Help children talk about feelings.
  - Read stepfamily books for adults and children.
  - Make changes gradually.
  - Keep children informed.

### **2. They must negotiate different developmental needs.**

- Adults and children will all be at different places in their lives. Individual needs will not usually fit together easily. It will take a lot of flexibility, tolerance and talking to understand and meet each others needs.
- Some strategies:
  - Take a parenting class.
  - Learn about developmental tasks of children.
  - Communicate needs clearly.
  - Be tolerant and flexible.

### **3. They must establish new traditions.**

- Children and adults need to affirm each other's past traditions and together build some new ones. Communication and compromise are essential.
- Some strategies:
  - Recognize that traditions are different, not right or wrong.
  - Use family meetings for problem solving.
  - Retain and combine some old traditions.
  - Together, create some new traditions.

#### **4. The couple relationship must be solid.**

- Making the couple relationship strong is a stepfamily's number one priority. Without that, the stepfamily will not succeed.
- Some strategies:
  - Nourish the couple relationship
  - Plan for couple "alone time."
  - Support one another regarding the children.
  - Expect and accept each other's different feelings.

#### **5. Stepparents need to work at developing a personal relationship with their stepchildren.**

- Stepparents and stepchildren need time alone to develop their relationship. This takes time - even years - so be patient!
- Some strategies:
  - Make one-on-one time.
  - Do not expect "instant" love or acceptance.
  - Always be fair to stepchildren even if caring is slow to develop.
  - Do some fun things together on a regular basis.

#### **6. Stepparents need to have a "civil" relationship with ex-spouses.**

- Having a businesslike relationship that is respectful and civil toward ex-spouses helps the children feel more loved and increases their self esteem.
- Some strategies:
  - Deal directly with adults.
  - Keep children out of the middle.
  - Never talk negatively about ex-spouses.
  - Avoid power struggles.
  - Keep lines of communication open.

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and can help you deal with stepfamily issues.

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