



Tips for Parents: Step Parents

When a family goes through a divorce or death of a spouse/parent and comes to a time when a parent is ready to move into a new marriage, the children may or may not be ready to accept the new spouse as a member of the family and as a step parent.

By forming reasonable expectations and building a network of support, understanding and encouragement, over time, the new family is likely to form positive bonds. When bringing individuals into a blended family it is important to remember these points:

Be realistic. Bringing individuals together into a new situation can be difficult. Don't anticipate immediate affection. Time and energy are needed to build a relationship. Take one day at a time and realize that everyone involved deals with change differently and that loving efforts may not be returned equally or at all for some time.

Understand the child and their needs. Each child is a unique individual. The child's age, gender and personality, as well as these factors, should be considered:

- Does the child feel safe and secure?
- Do they know they are loved?
- Are they seen and valued for who they are as an individual?
- Are their concerns and feelings listened to?

Build Trust

To feel safe and secure children need to know that they can trust their parents to do what they say they will. When parents divorce or die, this feeling of security can become broken and requires time and stability to mend. When a new spouse (and their child/children, if they have any) is brought into the home, extra care should be taken to build a safe and secure relationship by:

- Listening and working to emotionally connect to one another
- Encouraging and showing appreciation
- Setting rules and establishing boundaries

As each person is shown that they are valued for who they are, eventually the feelings will be reciprocated. Take time to encourage and show appreciation for the effort that is made to come together as a family.

Avoid "Replacing" other Parent

Realize that while you may see your new spouse as your parenting partner, your child may or may not feel the same way. Unless your previous spouse died or has been

largely missing for most of the child's life, the child is likely to resent your new spouse if he or she attempts to replace their other parent.

It is usually better to allow the relationship room to grow, and to encourage the child to define the relationship in a way that they are comfortable with. Don't force them to call the step parent "Mom" or "Dad." This doesn't mean, however, that the child should be allowed to be rude or to manipulate the situation for their own selfish benefit. Remember, well thought out rules and boundaries are for the benefit of all involved.

Blending a family takes time, patience, understanding and a willingness to listen. Change doesn't happen overnight. Life isn't always going to be peaceful and there will always be challenges to overcome; this is true of every relationship. The best advice is to take one day at a time—celebrating the good days and working through the difficult days with patience and perseverance.

For more information:

[Blending Families: A Guide for Stepparents](#)

[The National Stepfamily Resource Center](#)

[Adopting.org's articles on Stepparents](#)

Book: *Stepparenting: Creating and Recreating Families in America Today*. Edited by Stanley H. Cath and Moisy Shopper. Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press. 2001

You may also find these related Tips for Parents helpful:

[Tips for Parents: Divorce](#)

[Tips for Parents: Adoption](#)

[Tips for Parents: When a Mommy or Daddy Dies](#)

Help our community grow – share with a friend!

