

Step Families: Supporting your Children as Families are Blended and Living Arrangements Change.

Janine Brissett



We have just introduced our child/ren to their new step-family/ies. What is the best way to support them as they adjust to so much change?

- Do your best to maintain a courteous co-parenting alliance, with their father/mother.
- Make it clear to them that you and their Mum/Dad are still their parents, and will continue to communicate about them and their needs.
- It is best if both Mum and Dad seek their new partner's understanding and support of their co-parenting relationship with their children's other parent.

My children and I have rarely been apart. How will they manage being away from me for days at a time?

- Ask each child what would make it easier for him/her while you are apart, and listen for their response.
- Some children find taking a photo or letter from you helpful, and others may like phone contact from their other parent's home.
- Keep your focus on ways you can create a stable, nurturing home at your place.

I had a hard time growing up in a step-family. How can I prevent my children going through what I did?

- Be careful that your experience is not distorting the way you listen to or interpret your child's experience and challenges.
- Remember that many adults are able to create safe, nurturing and stable co-parenting arrangements for their children after separation and divorce.
- Consider joining a step-families support group.

I would like my children to call my partner Mum/Dad. How should we introduce this?

- It is difficult and confusing for a child, who is already calling their biological parents Mum and Dad to be asked to call their parent's new partner Mum or Dad.
- Encourage your child to call your partner by their first name, and be willing to negotiate with adolescents.
- Remember that what the children call him/her is less important than how caring and supportive a role s/he is able to play in their lives.

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My child is resisting moving in with me and my partner. When can I expect him/her to be more positive and accepting?

- It is normal for a child to resist such a significant change. Any anger and/or reluctance are likely to be natural expressions of grief and loss.
- This is not the time to cheer them up, but to validate and support them as they go through a whole range of feelings, including anger and sadness.
- Showing more willingness to understand your child's experience is the best way to allow his/her positive emotions to gradually emerge over time.

I am concerned that my former partner is turning my child against my partner. What should I do?

- Focus more on what your child is feeling and experiencing than what your former partner might be thinking or saying.
- Children hate to be told they sound like their other parent. Allow them to voice their thoughts or feelings about the new arrangements without criticism of their mother/father.
- If the problem continues, address this with your former partner, but not the children.

What about discipline? Should my partner be involved?

- Allow your partner and children time to build a relationship of friendship and trust, before involving her/him in disciplining them.
- Attend to your children's discipline yourself wherever possible. You may also need to consult with your children's other parent, in certain situations.

My child seems resentful of my partner's children. How can I help them to get along?

- Children in a step-family are highly sensitive to how the new arrangements will affect their relationship with their biological parent.
- Reassure your child that your love for him/her will not change because there are more children in the family.
- Address any hurt or anxious feelings in one on one time with your child.
- Remember to set time aside, regularly, to enjoy a game or meal with him/her alone.
- Hold regular family meetings, where rules, chores, or any other concern can be raised.

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