



Supporting Positive Stepfamily Relationships

Becoming a stepfamily is an important and often challenging transition for everyone involved. What are some of the common emotional challenges children face? What pitfalls should stepparents avoid? And what will help the whole family thrive and succeed? Here are Marti's suggestions:

I. Underlying issues for stepfamilies

- After divorce, children often fantasize about parents reuniting, but a parent's remarriage triggers the loss of that fantasy (and sadness or anger about that reality). Children also may resent and feel jealous of the time their parent spends with the stepparent. And children often feel they are being disloyal to their own mom or dad if they let themselves get close to their stepmom or stepdad.
- Blending families often involves a collision of different parenting approaches, which can cause confusion and stress for adults and kids.
- It is difficult for children to accept correction and discipline from anyone (a stepparent, in this case) until they have built a relationship of trust and respect. This takes time and effort on everyone's part.

II. Five tips for building positive stepfamily relationships

- 1) Unite on rules, expectations and consequence
- 2) Let the parent take the lead on enforcement
- 3) Schedule 1:1 time for fun activities with each child
- 4) Avoid competing with or criticizing partner's ex
- 5) Arm yourself with knowledge about child development and positive parenting