



Stepfamilies Australia
Strengthening Stepfamilies

TIP SHEETS

BIOLOGICAL FATHERS

Rarely does a traditional male role work well in a stepfamily. The part-time biological father is in danger of indulging his children. This becomes apparent when the new stepfamily is formed. The task for men is to develop a role that both works and provides them with a sense of purpose. This requires innovative thinking and flexibility.

See also **Stepmothers and Ex-partners Tip Sheets.**

EMOTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

Strong emotions felt following the break up of a 'marriage' can be compounded in the next relationship.

Biological fathers can feel:

- sadness through missing his children and sad that his relationship with his children is not so close, now that he has a new partner
- anger at his ex-partner for breaking up the marriage or guilt because he left the marriage
- torn between demands of his own children and his new partner (and stepchildren)
- protective of his children and/or of the new partner who is coping with his children and his expartner
- powerless to have much input in his children's lives
- fear of losing contact with his children if he upsets his ex-partner, or of being replaced by his children's stepfather
- Resentful that he is expected to change the way he parented while he was a single parent and for having little or no say in how payments for his children are used.

A biological father's expectations for the stepfamily are often different from the reality. Expectations which may not be met are:

- For the new partner to be a mother to his children

ONE IMPORTANT RULE

A strong couple bond is essential to the success of a stepfamily. Spend time alone as a couple on a regular basis, so that you develop a strong relationship. This will help you work together to solve issues and it models a working relationship for children.

- That there will be little or no outside interference from an ex-partner
- That he can compensate for children's losses and past hurts
- That the new stepfamily will operate with the same dynamics as the previous family.

BASIC TIPS

- Don't expect your stepfamily to work like a biological family. The stepfamily is complex. It is a family built on loss. There are a number of current and past relationships to be negotiated and possibly baggage from the past.
- Don't expect close loving relationships between all family members. Stepfamily members might grow to love each other given time, but this might never happen. Encourage an environment of respect and understanding.
- Don't expect the stepfamily to run smoothly from the beginning. It takes time to develop common goals and values, and to develop a family history and traditions.
- Remember yours is a complicated family made up of ex-partners and new partners. Try to be accommodating and communicative with members of each household. This can only benefit all children and yourself.
- Work with your partner to enforce rules and discipline.

WHERE TO GET FURTHER HELP:

Stepfamilies Australia: www.stepfamily.org.au

Family Relationships Advice Line: 1800 050 321

Family Relationships Online:

www.familyrelationships.gov.au

Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800 / www.kidshelp.com.au

Lifeline: 13 11 14

Men's Line Australia: 1300 789 978

Raising Children: www.raisingchildren.net.au

TIPS FOR BIOLOGICAL FATHERS

You will need to do a number of things differently now you are in a stepfamily. It will be a matter of juggling past and new relationships:

- Establish appropriate boundaries with your ex-partner. (see Ex-partners Tip Sheet)
- Work at carrying out discipline and consequences as decided with your partner
- Be aware that your partner may feel excluded when you and your ex-partner make decisions
- Don't expect the stepparent to assume the role of "mother". Be actively involved yourself in helping around the house and caring for your children
- Spend time alone with your children. Remember that you and your children have a primary relationship. Don't expect to do everything as a family

- Avoid being a 'Disneyland' dad. Time with your children is more important than indulging them with treats. Children enjoy being with you doing such things as helping wash the car, doing the garden, cooking meals and other activities
- Listen to your partner when she (he) expresses frustrations with the situation. The issues don't usually disappear when ignored. Work together to find solutions
- Encourage the stepparent to have a life outside the stepfamily. The role of stepparent can undermine self-esteem. It is important for the stepparent to maintain good self-esteem
- Explain to children that the stepparent has authority when you are absent. It can be very challenging for a stepparent when children turn against them only when their biological parent is absent. Your support in this situation is vital
- Be consistent by not making too many changes to children's routines. Consistency, predictability and understanding help children to be well adjusted.

BIOLOGICAL/STEPFATHERS EMOTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

See also Stepfathers Tip Sheet

Combining the role of biological father and stepfather can lead to some conflicting emotions.

These could include feeling of:

- Resentment of stepchildren for depriving your own children of time and affection
- Upset when your children are seen to receive less attention or leeway than your stepchildren

- Torn or guilty balancing fairness between your own children and stepchildren.

One common but unattainable expectation when combining two lots of children is:

- For the family groups to be equal.

TIPS FOR BIOLOGICAL/STEPFATHERS

- Acknowledge to yourself that you have closer feelings for your own children and allow free expression of these, particularly when on your own with your children.
- Give yourself permission to have time with your children when you are together and allow some other time for your stepchildren, partner and the whole stepfamily.
- Discuss with your partner or hold a family meeting to develop household rules.
- Aim to be fair to all. This is difficult when some members live part time in your household and when there is a discrepancy in resources between each family group.
- If relevant, explain to your stepchildren that you only have a short period of time with your own children, so that time is special.



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