

10 STEPS FOR MEN IN STEP

Downloaded 17 February 2008 from The Stepfamily Foundation
http://www.stepfamily.org/ten_steps_for_men_stepfamilies.htm

Step 1. The stepfather cannot function as the biological father. He is not the father and cannot function that way even if he lives with the children. The biological father always maintains that role even if he does not live with his children full time.

Step 2. "Over disciplining your stepchildren" -- WATCH IT! The biological mother can perceive it as too much too often. This can bring on the 'mama bear' protecting her young from the outsider syndrome.'

Step 3. "Under disciplining your own children" -- WATCH IT! Children do need structure and limits. If you are fair and consistent your children won't hate you for it. Set up the rules quickly so you spend less time disciplining.

Step 4. Structuring the household is a shared task between husband and wife. How is the time, energy and money used? What contributions are made by each member of the household? These must be sorted out and decided by the couple. Generally, the biological parent does the disciplining.

Step 5. Stepfather wants to be father. He can't: he can only be the stepfather, a resource person. He can be a guide for his stepchildren. Go slow.

Step 6. The biological father needs to learn how to mother. Traditionally, the woman took care of such mothering jobs as noticing table manners, hellos, good-byes, whether household jobs were done properly and what was to be done by the children. The biological father in step, whether he is full time or has visitation rights, needs to take on some of these mothering roles.

Step 7. Unrealistic expectations. Unrealistic expectations beget rejections and resentments. There are no models for stepfathers or biological fathers in step. We can all become cruel and withdrawn stepfathers or over indulgent bio-fathers in step. We can all be overly demanding spouses.

Step 8. Be aware of a conflict in sexual and biological pulls in stepfamily relationships. In the intact family, the couple come together to have a child and their energies focus on the child. In step, the blood ties and sexual ties are polarized. They can pull the family in opposite directions.

Step 9. Chronic sorrow/legitimate fear. The biological and/or divorced father misses his kids, fears the loss of affection and his personal input to his children. This is a legitimate fear. The less time he has with them, the less he wants to discipline.

Step 10. Guard your sense of humor and use it. There is nothing more influential to ending a fight than an understanding and warm smile.