



STEPFAMILY FOUNDATION *of* ALBERTA

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Parenting Stepchildren: Points to Consider Before Moving In Together

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Research conducted by the Stepfamily Foundation of Alberta (Stepparent Survey 2007-2008) reveals that a new stepfamily will function much better if the couple forming that stepfamily carefully discusses and details how they intend to care for, and manage each other's children before setting up their new household together. If you are considering starting a new stepfamily, plan to have a number of discussions on the topic with your partner. Forging a strong parenting team may be the single most important thing you can do for your new stepfamily and relationship at this point in time.

Consider the following points in your discussion(s).

- Describe how you parent your (biological) children, and explain why you parent them that way.
- Define the values and morals you wish to transmit to the children through your parenting, the standard of conduct you have for your own behaviour, and the way that you relate to your partner. Remember: Children learn what they see. Be proud of what you show them.
- Discuss what discipline means. Look up its Latin root. Discuss how it differs from punishment.
- State the parenting model (e.g., acting as an aunt/uncle, coach, mentor, etc.) you would like to adopt in parenting your stepchildren; and the model you would like to see your partner adopt towards your children. Discuss why these choices fit for you.
- If you could have only six household rules, which six would you adopt?
- If you could only have one household rule, what would it be?
- Define what you will see as acceptable behaviour.
- Define what you will see as unacceptable behaviour.
- Define the sanctions that are appropriate for likely misbehaviours.
- How will you encourage desired behaviours?
- How are you going to deal with kids of widely different age levels?
- State who should deliver sanctions when they are required.
- How will you announce your plans for parenting to the kids?
- Will you allow the kids to participate in setting the rules and identifying appropriate sanctions?

- Will you make an effort to coordinate rules and sanctions with the 'other' household(s)?
- How will you support one another in parenting your own children?
- How will you support one another in parenting each other's children?
- How will you, as a couple, address and resolve new issues and concerns that materialize regarding the care and management of the kids?
- How will you revise and update rules and expectations as the children age?
- How will you deal with unexpected situations where, as a couple, you disagree?
- What is the single most important thing you need from your partner to be the best parent you can be?

Two additional resources with links on www.stepfamily.ca are:

- 1) The Gift of Discipline: What your kids need and want from you.
- 2) How to Make Shuttling Between Households Easier

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