

Building Stepfamily Relationships

Stepfamilies are very complex, and stepparents are faced with unique parenting challenges. Building positive stepfamily relationships takes patience and work. It can seem like an overwhelming task, but parents can focus on some guidelines to ensure the transition goes smoothly.

In this issue:

- Building stepfamily relationships
- Guidelines for building stepfamily relationships



Helpful Tips for Building Stepfamily Relationships

- **Settle into the stepparent role slowly**
Stepparents need to be flexible and patient when building relationships with their stepchildren. Stepparent-stepchildren bonds take time to establish. Forming friendships with stepchildren before trying to discipline them is important for establishing a stepparent-stepchild bond.
- **Hold regular family meetings**
Family meetings reassure children that they play an important role in family decisions. Family meetings give all members an opportunity to voice their concerns about family issues.
- **Discuss rules and discipline**
It is important that all family members understand and work together in discipline matters. Discipline may be more effective if the biological parent enforces discipline methods until the stepparent-stepchild bond is stronger.
- **Do not forget about the couple relationship**
New couples need to spend time with each other in order to build their relationship. Being honest and practicing effective communication skills is essential for building this relationship.

Helpful Tips for Building Stepfamily Relationships Continued:

- **Make new traditions as a family**
Old family traditions provide stability for children, but forming new traditions helps to create a cohesive family unit.
- **Create family time**
Strengthening family bonds and making new family memories is important for stepfamilies. Spending quality time together allows stepfamily members to get to know each other better.
- **Spend time one-to-one**
Children need to spend time alone with both their biological parent and their stepparent. Spending alone time with their biological parent reinforces their parent's love and support for them. Time spent alone between stepparent and the stepchild allows them to cultivate their relationship.
- **Reassure children that they can love both of their parents**
It is important to remind children that they can have loving feelings toward both their nonresidential parent and their stepparent. Parents can also love both their biological children and their stepchildren.
- **Encourage and support the children's bond with their nonresidential parent**
Children have a lifelong bond with both of their parents. It is important for children to stay connected with their nonresidential parent. Avoid criticizing the other parent when children are around.

Monthly tip for families:

Encourage the stepparent to complete an activity with their stepchild.

Additional Resources:

www.extension.usu.edu/stepfamily

www.healthyrelationshipsutah.org

www.strongermarriage.org

www.stepfamilies.info

www.twoofus.org

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