

HAVING A STEP FAMILY RELATIONSHIP

There are a number of issues that arise in a stepfamily that are different for those where there are two biological parents.

There may be confusing relationship expectations between stepchildren and stepparent as well as continuing emotions from the previous family (eg pain, guilt and hostility).

Stepfamilies need time to adjust and develop new habits and traditions and time for the adults to develop and negotiate satisfactory parenting roles.

This means that it is absolutely crucial for the couple to discuss expectations of parenting (including discipline and housework) and to understand that the new family will probably not resemble the previous one.

It seems that the two biggest issues for parents in the stepfamily are discipline and showing affection.

If too much emphasis is placed by the stepparent on discipline or taking on a disciplinarian role, the stepchild will be less likely to respond to attempts of nurturance and affection by the stepparent.

Where mutual trust and respect have been given a chance to develop between the stepchild and stepparent, and where roles of each parent are clear, the chance for a harmonious home life is increased.

Some roles that a stepparent may find himself or herself adopting:

Positive roles

Parent
Older friend
Confidante
Aunt/Uncle

Neutral roles

Stepparent
Acquaintance
Guardian
Distant relative

Negative roles

Interferer
Authority figure
Opponent
Invader

As a stepparent can you identify a role or roles that you take with your stepfamily?

What role, or roles, would you prefer to be taking?

What role or roles does your partner feel you adopt within the stepfamily?