

Creative Strategies to Help Your Stepfamily Survive and Thrive

29 Ways to Make Your Stepfamily Work

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4. Great Expectations

The current divorce rate is higher for stepfamilies than first-time marriages. The culprit? Most often, it's well-intentioned couples who fail to recognize or address the realities of stepfamily life. Stepfamilies are different than traditional, nuclear families. Not better or worse, but definitely different.

Most people embark on the journey of combining families with high hopes and enthusiasm. Keep your optimism! A positive vision for your stepfamily is an asset. But you must balance your optimism with realistic expectations. Otherwise, your great expectations may quickly turn to resentments and frustration (or worse yet, divorce).

On the other hand, if you're a natural pessimist, focus on the positive aspects of stepfamily life – more people to love, your relationship with your partner and opportunities for growth.

Keep these differences in mind:

Stepfamily	Traditional family
The couple often has little time alone and must share their time with the children	The couple often has years alone before children come along
Children often live in two separate households	Children live in one home
Partners' parenting values and styles are formed before they meet	Styles usually evolve together over years
Children have three to four adults who serve in a parental role	Children have two parents
"Outsider" interference with your family can come from ex-mates, their new partners, biological and step relatives	Any interference usually comes from biological relatives only
Children suffer loyalty issues with birth parents and stepparents	No similar loyalty issues
Typically two to six children in home	Typically one to three children in home

Keys to Adjusting Your Expectations:

- ✓ Let go of your fantasy of creating a nuclear family
- ✓ Accept that you are "just" the stepmom or stepdad – no matter how wonderful, horrible, absent or involved the parent outside your home may be
- ✓ Accept the fact that remarriage is a gain for the adults, but children often see it as another loss
- ✓ Be patient – creating a stepfamily that gels takes time (see Way #7)

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