

rules of the home will help the children's transition to any new or modified rules in the home.

The adults must work together in harmony when it comes to the rules. Any disagreements or potential changes should be discussed by the parents in private.

As a stepparent, you should make yourself available to discuss the rules with the children and help them to understand any rules with which they may not be familiar. By doing so, you can show you indeed care for the happiness and safety of the children. This is a sign of how much you love them.

Explain the rules in the presence of all the children—those not yours by birth as well as your biological children. Remember, fairness in keeping and enforcing the rules of the home is very important.

### **Something old, something new**

A stepparent will hear things like “When Daddy was here, we used to ...” or “When Mommy was alive, each Sunday we. ...” Family traditions are hallmarks of the family unit. Adults and children alike enjoy routines that not only bring the family together, but produce happy and fulfilling experiences to be remembered fondly for weeks and months. Though a stepparent is not a “replacement” for the biological parent, he or she can perhaps find ways to enjoy and share in these special opportunities.

In fact, a newly blended family can carve out new family traditions. Activities like biking, horseback riding, scrapbooking or hiking can build strong bonds within a new family. Ask the children what they like to do and ask for feedback on activities completed together.

### **And respect for all**

Whether the birth parent is alive or dead, it is necessary for the stepparent to show respect and to be sensitive to the relationship the birth parent had with the children. In some cases the relationship will continue, and children will continue to visit their birth parent.

Wisdom dictates that the stepparent should never dishonor or disrespect the birth parent.

Children may sometimes sing the praises of the stepparent while using disparaging remarks to describe their birth parent. This could be a good teaching opportunity for the stepparent to help the children learn about compassion and patience with others. It may be appropriate to ask the children to pray for the birth parent who is struggling.

### **Stepping up to step parenting**

Children require parenting no matter what their age. There are different parenting tools for different ages, but the fact remains—whether you're a birth parent or stepparent, you have a tremendous responsibility to help shape and mold the minds of children.

The apostle Paul told parents, “Do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

Will there be bumps in the road at times? Of course! Will children test the boundaries of house rules? Yes. When these and other matters arise in the day-to-day running of a home, the question is, will those responsible for the welfare of the children step up and parent?

The Bible tells us that children are a beautiful gift from God (Psalm 127:3-4). These “gifts” may never admit it, but they are looking for good, capable adults to model for them how to live a structured life. A wise stepparent who is not afraid to lead by example will step up and patiently parent for the future benefit of all their children.

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P.O. Box 1252  
Sunnybank Hills, QLD 4109

Email: [cogwa.australia@gmail.com](mailto:cogwa.australia@gmail.com)  
<http://www.cogwa.org.au>

# Life Hope & Truth

## Step Parenting

*Whether you are single or are bringing children into a new marital union, step parenting can be a rewarding responsibility when entered into wisely.*

What do you think about when you think of step parenting? One family sitcom that was hugely successful told the story of two people who decided to blend their families together into one unit, and that unit came to be known as *The Brady Bunch*. Many who consider becoming stepparents no doubt think about that show and the dynamics created within their fictitious family.

But marriage, parenting and step parenting are not lighthearted entertainment. They are serious business.

When a man and woman are considering marriage, they are wise to counsel about such things as compatibility, family, finances and other important factors. The same principle applies when a person desires to become a spouse and a stepparent.



Step parenting can be a rewarding responsibility.

## Before creating a new family

Before becoming a stepparent, consider what you will need to do in order to have a good relationship with all the children in your new family. Patience and understanding are two essential characteristics for a potential stepparent. These two qualities are especially important when it comes to dealing with:

- Children who still hold out hope that their birth parents will get back together.
- Children who have a close relationship with the divorced birth parent.
- Being viewed as a “replacement” if a birth parent has died.
- Being viewed as the one who “broke up” the birth parents’ marriage.
- Building a meaningful relationship with the stepchildren.

New stepparents must realize that close relationships built on trust don’t happen in just a day or two. Children of divorced parents may feel they have been deserted or that their parents divorced because of them. These feelings can create a whirlwind of emotions—some of which may not be healthy.

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A stepparent who attempts to *buy his way* into the lives of children or to just be a *buddy* is likely in for a painful surprise. Children, especially teens, can sniff out hypocrisy or disingenuous compliments a mile away.

By contrast, children who get to know a potential stepparent prior to the marriage generally feel less pressure and may thus be able to more easily accept the new relationship when it actually occurs. If stepchildren

know that their new stepparent genuinely cares for them, it will be easier for them to accept and admire the new parent in their lives.

Of course, circumstances vary and every child has his or her own personality and concerns. Some children readily accept the new family, while others take longer to adapt.

## The transition to step parenting

The advice to take things slowly is not something people like to hear today; yet, if you are planning to become a stepparent, this is the best formula. If you’ve never had children, you are going to have the opportunity to assist the birth parent in rearing responsible children. If both of you are bringing children into a new family (blending families), an amazing opportunity awaits you in establishing and building new relationships between adults and children.

The transition into step parenting brings with it many variables, which can include not only your new spouse, but also your new spouse’s children and your new spouse’s ex-partner. Because strong emotions are often involved, moving cautiously, slowly and carefully can pay huge dividends as you assume the role of stepparent.

Your love and caring will shine through as you set a good example for all to see. Just remember that relationships need time to blossom and grow.

According to KidsHealth.org, other factors that may impact the transition to step parenting include:

- **How old the kids are.** When it comes to adjusting and forming new relationships, younger kids generally have an easier time than older kids.
- **How long you’ve known them.** Usually, the longer you know the kids, the better the relationship. There are exceptions (for example, if you were friends with the parents before they separated and are blamed for the break-up), but in most cases having a history together makes the transition a little smoother.

- **How long you dated the parent before marriage.** Again, there are exceptions but typically if you don’t rush into the relationship with the adult, kids have a good sense that you are in this for the long haul.
- **How well the parent you marry gets along with the ex-spouse.** This is a critical factor. Minimal conflict and open communication between ex-partners can make a big difference regarding how

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easily kids accept you as their stepparent. It’s much easier for kids to transition to new living arrangements when adults keep negative comments out of earshot.

- **How much time the kids spend with you.** Trying to bond with children every other weekend—when they want quality time with a birth parent they don’t see as often as they’d like—can be a difficult way to make friends with your new stepkids. Remember to put their needs first: If kids want time with their birth parent, they should get it. So sometimes making yourself scarce can help smooth the path to a better relationship in the long run.”

## New family, same boundaries

A wise stepparent will discuss the rules and boundaries of behavior within the home with their new potential spouse prior to getting married. Whatever the rules, it is important that the children see that everyone is held to the same standard when it comes to praise or punishment.

Children are adept at sensing and pointing out hypocrisy or favoritism. Being consistent in implementing the