

Family meetings

When difficulties arise, get the family together to talk openly about how they might be resolved. Children of all ages like to feel as though they have a voice and are being listened to.

Create new traditions

Stepfamilies don't have a shared history, so work on building new memories and experiences together. This doesn't mean that you have to replace all the old family traditions, but that you add to them, creating new ones that reflect your new family.

One-to-one time

Spend time with each child individually – for example, doing an activity they enjoy or taking them out for something to eat. Try to ensure that you give an equal amount of time to all the children in the family.

Don't use the 'S word'

There's no need to refer to your children as step-children. They are yours – not biologically, but from choice. Make them your own, not by asking them to call you mum or dad, but by showing no favouritism, bias or difference. The words, 'This is my son' or 'This is my daughter' tell the world and your children that you love them and that they are your family!



Whether they are simple or profound, traditions say to us, "You belong here – these are your roots."

Rob and Dianne Parsons



Care for the Family creates resources that help build firm foundations for family life and help those who face family difficulties.

Resources

Read *We Always ... Making Memories That Last a Lifetime* by Rob and Dianne Parsons **cff.org.uk/shop**

Visit the Parenting section of our website **cff.org.uk/parenting**

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Top Tips For Parents

Parenting in a Stepfamily



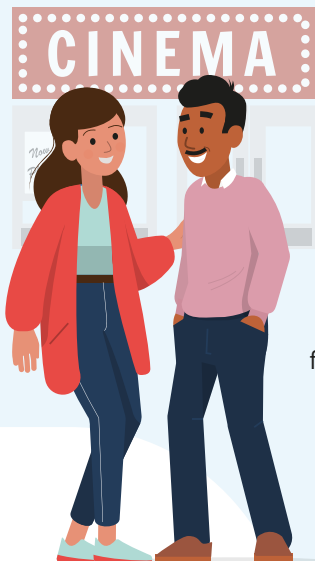
Being a parent is one of the most important jobs you will ever do. Usually you have months or even years to prepare for it, but as a step-parent, gaining a new family almost overnight can be a daunting experience, particularly if you don't already have children.

Most step-parents will say that life in a stepfamily can be the greatest privilege you'll ever have – but it's not for the faint-hearted! Here are some tips that can help you to build a happy and healthy blended family.

Don't ignore your own relationship

It can be tempting as step-parents to invest all your energies into creating a strong bond with the step-children, but don't overlook

your own relationship. It's important to keep your relationship healthy for both you and the children. Make sure you spend time alone together, perhaps having regular date nights. Talk to each other about how you are feeling, share any struggles you may be having, and don't forget to celebrate when things are going well.



Don't expect miracles

It's unusual for there to be instant emotional bonds between step-children and step-parents – most will be very uncertain about how they feel. Don't try to force feelings that just aren't there. Respect your children's emotional boundaries and recognise your own boundaries too. Be kind to yourself, and give yourself and the children time to adjust to each other.

Acknowledge the situation

Stepfamilies can come about as a result of a variety of challenging situations. Children may struggle to come to terms with changes in their family life, and have unrealistic or unreasonable expectations of what their new stepfamily should look like. Help them to adapt to their new family by working to create a new group identity. Spend time doing activities that you all enjoy, and experiment with discovering new interests you can share together.

Respect their mum and dad

This is the golden rule for any parent, but especially in a stepfamily, where there might be divided loyalties. However tempting it may be, never criticise your child's other parent in front of them. When you do this, you force your child to choose between the two of you, and you risk making them feel disloyal, guilty or angry.

Agree on ground rules

It is vital that you have a shared understanding with your partner of what is and isn't acceptable behaviour. Agree on boundaries and disciplinary issues. In a stepfamily, it takes time for the step-parent to earn the position of parent. At first, the biological parent should take the role of main disciplinarian with the step-parent reinforcing this in a secondary role. Never give the children the opportunity to play one of you off against another. Present a united front and back one another up in front of them, discussing any issues between yourselves later.

You're not my real mum/dad!

This declaration is almost certain to be made at one point or another – especially when it comes to matters of discipline. Acknowledge from the start to your step-children that you know you are not their real mum or dad and that it is not your intention to try and replace them. However, be firm and consistent in giving the message that when you are the adult in charge you expect them to listen to you.

