

PART OF THE PARENTLINE PLUS STEPFAMILY SERIES

BEING A STEPDAD



Parentline_{plus}

Because instructions aren't included

BEING A STEPDA

Thousands of men are stepdads. You may not call yourself a stepdad, and you don't have to be married but you are in a relationship with a woman who has children. You are not a substitute dad so you don't have to try to become one. Your role is important but different.



STARTING OUT

It can be an exciting time for you and your partner, but for the children involved it may be difficult. They may still be upset about the family they have lost. Being the new man around may mean that you'll sometimes bear the brunt of their anger, frustration and confusion.

✓ Parentline Plus tips

- **Give it time.** It may take time before your partner's children accept you. They may want their parents to get back together and may feel jealous of the attention their mum is giving you.

*"I have had to learn to cope with Jenny as a mother as well as my partner, and accept there are times when she is going to spend time with them rather than with me."**

- **Reassure them.** Let them know that you are not trying to replace their dad but you are someone they can turn to if they want to.

"When things get bad and I try to do something, she constantly tells me 'you're not my real dad'."

THEIR DAD, HER EX

It is important the children see their dad, but saying goodbye to him may be hard. They may have a lot to work out with their dad, and their moods may change. Let them know you're around if they want to talk but encourage them to see their dad, if appropriate.

Try not to get involved with tensions between your partner and her ex, especially when around the children. At times there may be conflict between you and the children's dad. Keeping a distance may help you maintain respect for him.

'YOUR CHILDREN' AND 'HER CHILDREN'

If you have your own children you may be dealing with the pain of not seeing them as often, worrying about how they are getting on and dealing with their anger too. Like your stepchildren, they may find it hard to adjust. Let them know you are around for them.

Whether they are living with you, or not, there may be concerns about jealousy between 'your' children and 'her' children. Give your children time to get used to sharing your attention with your partner's children. Make an effort to spend time alone with your children to do everyday things together, to talk and to listen. But balance this with treating all the children fairly.

STAYING OVER

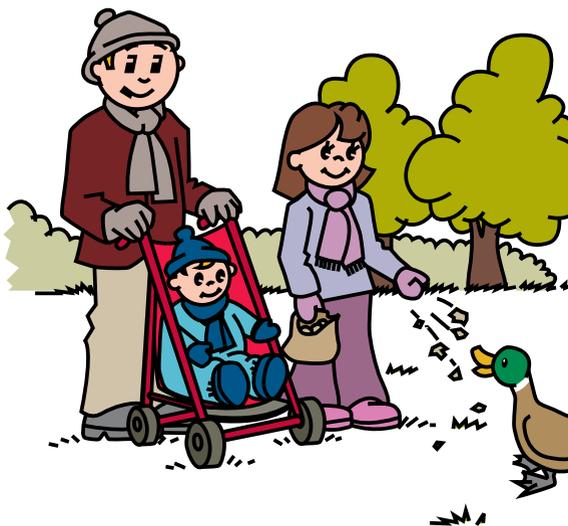
Your children may visit and stay over. Try to make sure they feel that it is their home too by providing them with their own space, whether it is their own bed or simply space to store their things – toys, books, photographs, clothes etc.

RECHARGE YOUR BATTERIES

It's hard trying to please everyone, so it is important to make some time for yourself to relax – go for a walk, to the gym – whatever helps.

ALONE WITH YOUR PARTNER

Let your partner know you need her support and want to agree ways of dealing with problems together. Also create time to relax together and strengthen your relationship.



THE REWARDS

Being a stepdad can be hard work but your contribution to the family is important. You're helping the children develop into happy, healthy adults who see you as someone who has been there for them. You will also have given them a wider family, with more people to turn to for support, guidance and advice.

HELP YOURSELF

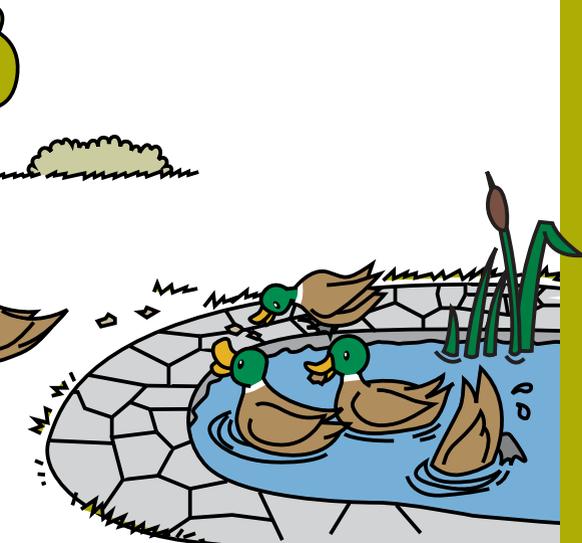
There are many men in your situation – some of them are probably your friends or relatives. Try talking to them and find out how they have dealt with things – what worked for them?

GETTING HELP

Stepfamilies are complicated and your circumstances may be very different from those mentioned within this leaflet. If you want more help try Parentline Plus; stepdads call and email us about a range of problems.

PARENTLINE PLUS TOP TIPS

- ✓ Grab opportunities to listen and talk
- ✓ Get to know what your stepchildren like doing
- ✓ Encourage your partner's children to see their dad
- ✓ Start new routines and new celebrations
- ✓ Make time for just you and your partner
- ✓ Recharge your batteries
- ✓ Tread carefully around discipline and the children
- ✓ Talk to other men in similar situations
- ✓ Give all the family time to adjust
- ✓ Have faith that you are making a difference



FREE HELPLINE: 0800 800 2222
Free Textphone: 0800 783 6783
Website: www.parentlineplus.org.uk
Email Helpline: parentsupport@parentlineplus.org.uk

ADJUSTING

If you're finding it difficult you may want to take some time to think about what is going on and what will help.

Parentline Plus tips

- **Rules and routines.** Perhaps your partner and her children have different routines, ways of celebrating events like birthdays, ideas about places to go to like cinemas or eating out. Talk about how you can combine the best of both so that some of the children's familiar routines continue and you don't feel left out either.

"One of the reasons for things working out is that I have fitted into the routines of the house."*

- **"Don't do that!"** Setting rules and encouraging 'good' behaviour is difficult for any parent and harder if you're a stepparent. Before putting your foot down it's important to get to know your partner's children to gain their trust and build mutual respect. Also, ensure that you have your partner's support first.
- **Whose dad?** Don't insist on her children calling you 'Dad'. You are not their dad, and if you have children you are someone else's dad. Let her children decide what they want to call you e.g. by your first name, or a nickname.

- **Let them talk.** Whatever their age, ensure that the children know that it is OK to talk. Perhaps they'll discuss their worries with you, and perhaps not. Just let them know that you're happy to listen if they want to talk.

TEENAGERS

Stepfamily life can seem even more complicated with teenagers.

Parentline Plus tips

- **They are growing and changing rapidly:** physically, mentally, and emotionally. At the same time they are getting used to you and their mum's relationship. This can be confusing for them, so what they do or say may not always make sense to you. When there is a conflict listen to them and find a compromise.
- **Give them space:** As they try to find ways of dealing with the situation, and are developing their own identity, they may want time on their own. This is not necessarily a rejection of you but a need for space to sort things out for themselves.



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FURTHER HELP

This leaflet is only a guide. If you need someone to talk to, try the Parentline Plus helpline **0808 800 2222** or email helpline **parentsupport@parentlineplus.org.uk**. Or if you have a hearing or speech impairment try our free textphone **0800 783 6783**.

Parentline Plus produces information on various parenting issues.

Try our website for more information on parenting **www.parentlineplus.org.uk** or email **parentsupport@parentlineplus.org.uk**

OTHER USEFUL NUMBERS AND WEBSITES

Relate

Counselling for people experiencing relationship difficulties.

Tel: 0845 456 1310

ChildLine

Service for children and young people to talk to someone about any problems.

Tel: 0800 1111
www.childline.org.uk

www.itsnotyourfault.org.uk

A website for children and young people whose parents are splitting up. Section for parents too.

*Quotations taken from *Diary of a Stepfather* by Leslie Wilson, published by Parentline Plus.

This leaflet was written by Stephen Kaye.



Parentline Plus: 520 Highgate Studios, 53-79 Highgate Road, Kentish Town, London NWS 1TL
Free helpline: 0808 800 2222 Free textphone (for people with a speech or hearing impairment): 0800 783 6783
Email: parentsupport@parentlineplus.org.uk

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