



Step families

“Come here you kids, I’ve got something to tell you. You know me and Brian go together, well he’s going to move here and stay with us now!”

“Is he going to bring his kids too, because they can go to school with us unna?”

“Yeah - Is that OK?”

“Yeah that will be deadly . . . but where are they going to sleep?”

Step families are usually decided by two adults who want to be together. People get together for a lot of different reasons like love, companionship, money, and necessity.

A mother might find she cannot live with her partner and choose to make a go of it with someone else, or a father might decide he wants to live with someone else after his wife has left or passed on. The kids may not share the same feelings about it.

This building of a new partnership is an exciting but challenging time. It needs a lot of time, energy and hard work. There are many different kinds of step families and each have different strengths to build on and and difficulties to deal with. There are other people involved, including the extended family. Every family and step family is unique. What works for some may not work for others. Each will have different strengths to build on and difficulties to deal with.

What can it mean for your kids?

- They might have to move house.
- They might have to share their home with more people.
- They might have to change schools and make new friends.
- They might not be able to see the other parent as often as they’d like.
- They feel a sense of loss and may be sad.
- They may not even know what they really feel.

Not all kids will react in the same way to the loss of the old family and the beginnings of the new family.

For some kids it can mean that any hope of their parents getting back together is over. Some kids might even feel that they have lost their parents to someone else.

Kids might feel bad if they think they are choosing between parents and step-parents.

Kids might have trouble letting go of old family rules and traditions and learning new ones.

A partner is not immediately the new mother or father.

There might be difficulties for the kids and parents over contact and visiting times with the other parents.

Kids need to know what the rules of the new family will be and what will happen if the rules are broken. All kids need discipline.

Discipline is hard to do for many parents but in step-families discipline can be tricky. Talk to your partner about what sort of discipline will be used in the home and who does it at the time.

If kids play up, remember you are the grown up and have a responsibility to guide your kids. Discipline is about us teaching and kids learning. It does not mean hitting, which is what a lot of parents think when they hear the word. See topics Discipline (0-12 years) and Discipline (teens) from Parenting SA.

These things might help

- talk honestly with your partner and kids about all the new plans
- let your kids know things will be different and that it will take time to get used to the new changes
- listen to your kids and answer questions honestly
- don't speak badly of the other parent in front of the kids
- be fair and balance your attention and time with each kid
- allow each kid to have some privacy
- let kids have time to sort out their feelings
- remember kids need to grieve the loss of one family and time to get used to a new family

These places might be able to help you

Family Well Being(08) 8463 4800

The Sacred Site Within(08) 8240 4597

Building a new family is exciting but needs a lot of time, energy and hard work.

Written in Partnership

Ingrid O'Loughlin
Parenting SA

Artwork Ingrid O'Loughlin

Produced by

Parenting SA - telephone (08) 8303 1660
© Copyright
Revised 0806

Parent Helpline

1300 364 100



Government of South Australia

Children, Youth and Women's
Health Service