

Clinical Corner – How to Step-parent

Whether you are already a parent or not, taking on the responsibility of being a stepparent can be a difficult and challenging job. Depending upon the ages and number of children that are involved, you may have to deal with several different responses to you, as a new parental figure. It is quite normal for a new stepparent to feel like an outsider or an interloper in someone else's family. It is important to remember that you and your new spouse are creating a new family. If you have children too, you will be creating something called a "Blended Family", because you will be blending your two families into one. It may take some time, but everyone involved needs to find their new place. **The following are some guidelines that may be helpful:**

Work It Out

Sit down with your spouse and talk about the problems, fears, expectations or roadblocks that you may have. You might have to take your wife or husband's ex into consideration when making decisions about how much authority you will have as a parental figure.

Create New Family Traditions.

As a new family, you have no traditions. One of the things that makes a family a cohesive unit is a history composed of shared memories and experiences. Over time, this new family will create its own history which will help solidify it into a family unit. It is important to let everyone mourn the loss of their old ways and traditions while creating new and unique ones for the future.

Love Me, Love My Kids.

It is very common and normal to believe that because you love your new spouse, you'll also love their children. Good intentions aside, you can't force or just expect that people will love or care for one another. It's not fair or reasonable to believe that because you're married, everyone in the family will be in love with each other. Initially, what's most important is that there is a mutual respect among all the family members. Forging a new relationship as a parental figure with the children of your spouse will take time, patience and some hard work on everyone's part.

Second Parent, Second Best?

Not so surprisingly, many stepparents feel like they are second best. They have a whole lot of history to try and compete with. Don't try to compete. Be yourself. The best thing for everyone is to just be who you are.

"Your Not My Real Father/Mother, I Don't Have To Do What You Say."

Don't be surprised when you hear this or something very much like it. Working with your spouse and creating a plan for parenting will go a long way to help remedy this type of situation. At some point, the whole family will need to talk openly about these issues and how you will all deal with them. What is most important is that you and your spouse agree on how to proceed and be consistent with kids.