

INTRODUCTIONS

DISCIPLINE

Don't force a new partner to accept your children if they are not ready. Avoid choosing a stressful time such as a family event to introduce them to each other.

To allow time for step-parents to build a friendship, natural parents should initially be responsible for disciplining children.

ROUTINE

HONESTY

Parents need to plan well ahead. If you agree on pick-up times, keep to your word. Children need to feel sure of their parents, and a clear routine helps them to feel secure.

There is no right way of parenting or step parenting. It's okay to let children know that you don't always have all the answers.

BLAME

TWO HOUSEHOLDS

Don't demand more from yourself as a step parent than as a parent. No parent likes their children all the time. All families are imperfect, so don't blame all your problems on being a step family.

Moving between two homes and adapting to different environments may be hard for step children. Parents should try to emphasise the benefits to children of having two families.

FOOD

GESTURES

Is central to any family, and an area where approval and disapproval are expressed through likes and dislikes. If meal times are hard, give it time. Families eventually gel and develop tastes, habits, and patterns that belong to them.

A little can mean a lot in a step family; a kind word, a hug, playing ball, or a bunch of flowers can help breakdown the barriers.



POWER

Try to look at things from a child's point of view. Children have no control over their parents' separation, and their only power is to show their dissatisfaction. They often blame themselves for the break-up.

LISTENING

Listen to children. Though they may not want to talk, try to give them opportunities to do so, when they are ready. But don't be intrusive

HURTING

If you say you never loved your former partner, this may imply you have never loved the child either. If you paint a negative picture of them, children may think of themselves as part of the "mistake".

THIRD PARTIES

An uncle, aunt, family friend etc with whom a stepchild can talk, can bridge communication breakdowns with parents.

CHRISTMAS

High expectations lead to disappointment. Don't look for perfection. Children may want to see both parents and be scared of hurting one of them. Accommodate these needs, as well as your own.

PRESENTS

These often encourage sibling rivalry. Consider size and expense, and help children with their own gift preparations. Adults should not be hurt when children buy a bigger present for one parent. Absent parents must be wary of compensating for their feelings of guilt

RULES

All families have unspoken assumptions by which they live. Children may feel dissatisfied or pressurised if what happens doesn't match their expectations. Set aside time to discuss this with them.

THE PAST

Adjusting to each other isn't always about going forward; it is more likely to be two steps forward and one back. As certain issues arise, they can produce demons from the past that test the new family bonds.