



## Cooperative Extension Service

Department of Family & Consumer Science  
College of Agriculture



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### BUILDING STRONG STEPFAMILIES: IT'S A PROCESS

*Remarriage is the triumph  
of hope over experience.*

--Samuel Johnson--

Transcending Johnson's tongue-in-cheek cynicism demands a *process* of merging experience with hope. While divorce rates are higher on second marriages, the truth is that many adults and children do make things work out better the second time around.

Remarried...blended...reconstituted families, like all other family groups, *become* strong as their caring, communication, pride, unity, and community ties help heal and build on the past and move into a shared future.

#### FAMILY CARING

- \*Sensitivity to member needs for affirmation, trust, support
- \*Unconditional acceptance, affection
- \*Emotional closeness, warmth
- \*Positive attitude about step relations
- \*Seeing "instant love" as unrealistic
- \*Unity, love by example in couple

#### FAMILY COMMUNICATION

- \*Frequent, open, clear, direct expression of feelings, experiences, goals, dreams, joys, and sorrow
- \*Responsibility for feelings, actions
- \*Discussions of values and beliefs
- \*Parent modeling of negotiation and compromise
- \*Acceptance that understanding each other takes time

#### FAMILY PRIDE

- \*Commitment to one another and unique family traits
- \*Integrating and inventing rituals and traditions

#### FAMILY UNITY

- \*Time together
- \*Commitment to something greater
- \*Shared values and goals
- \*Parent agreement on discipline
- \*Coping strategies to handle stress
- \*Problems framed as opportunities
- \*Strong parenting coalition (residential and non-custodial)

#### COMMUNITY AND FAMILY TIES

- \*Connections to practical, emotional support network
- \*Involvement in community institutions (school, church, local groups)
- \*Openness to new relationships

Stepfamilies who focus on these traits as "ways to get there" rather than "points of arrival" can turn their fondest hopes into practical reality.

Traits description adapted from S.F. Duncan & G. Brown (1992). RENEW: A program for building for building remarried family strengths. Families and Society, 73, (3), 149-158. RENEW was piloted by and is available from AL Cooperative Extension as a 6-session hands-on workshop or home study program

#### PARTNERS ON CHINOOK:

WY Dept. of Education  
WY Dept. of Family Services  
WY Dept. of Health

### ROUNDUP ON THIS EDITION

TOPIC PAGE

*Research and Theory* 2  
Recent findings on key issues  
Perspectives guiding research and practice

*Stats and Facts* 3-4  
Back-to-back fact sheets on demographics and development

*Just in Time* 5-8  
Information and activity ideas for the public or professionals  
TRANSITION KEYS  
FINANCES IN REMARRIAGE  
STEP GRANDPARENTING

*Catch the Wind* 9-10  
A digest of resources, public policy issues, and topics of interest to professionals and families

Feedback or requests for resources or training welcomed.  
For more resources on family life education check out the UW Extension Family Life World Wide Web site, "Dreamcatcher" at [www.uwyo.edu/ag/ces/family/dream.htm](http://www.uwyo.edu/ag/ces/family/dream.htm)

# Research Briefs

## New Findings on Stepfamilies

### Preparing for Remarriage

Remarried (100 males, 105 females) described their primary way of preparing (59% = living together; 25%M & 38%F = counseling; 2%M & 8%F = support group). Written material was more often sought and found helpful than friends, counselors, or support groups (esp. women). Most agreed they were overly optimistic, naive relative to issues and needs (often learned too late). Non-cohabitants had more disagreements; advice-seekers from all sources tended to have more family problems. Male counselees had fewer parenting problems. Advice to counselors: reach out to single adults, group gatekeepers; teach via popular media; cite readings for parents, kids; examine own attitudes and training about stepfamilies; think prevention. *Lawrence Ganong & Marilyn Coleman. (1989). Preparing for remarriage: Anticipating issues, seeking solutions. Family Relations, 38, (1), 28-33.*

### Stepfamilies and 4-H

A survey of 220 MO 4-H parents found single- and step-parents (<10% and 19% of sample) had more difficulty attending meetings and supporting projects, but viewed child benefits as did other parents. State, regional, and local 4-H staff appreciated barriers (lack of time, transportation, money, social stigma). Some leaders saw study as attack on 4-H; others proposed flexible rules (fewer required meetings, alternate project formats) to accommodate all family structures.

*Lawrence Ganong. (1993). Family diversity in a youth organization: Involvement of single parent families and stepfamilies in 4-H. Family Relations, 42, (3), 286-292.*

### Piloting Stepfamily Resources

119 AL Extension educators, placed in continuing education two formats (& control group) on remarried families (unique family styles; meeting member needs; building solid marriage; defining stepparent roles; deciding on discipline; extended stepfamilies; economic issues). Evaluation measure of 14 vignettes/multiple choice items at six levels of Bloom taxonomy revealed significant gains (50% to 62% correct) for the group using written materials (vs. audiotape, control groups).

*Fitzpatrick, Jacki A.; Smith, Thomas A.; & Williamson, Sally A. (1992). Educating extension agents: An evaluation of method and development of a remarried family education program. Family Relations, 41, (1), 70-73.*

### Stepfamily Training Effects

Ten female and four male stepparents (late 30s, w/teens) participated in 4-6 hr. communication (attending, listening/responding to content and feelings, self-awareness genuineness) and parenting (rules, consequences, family meetings, integration) sessions. Post-tests revealed improvements on communication skills, desirable parenting (accepting/responding to child feelings), but no decrease in undesirable parenting (threats, preaching, ignoring) or in family cohesion. Scores in relation to a comparison group (mostly dads) were favorable. Notes key issues (complex adjustments, myths, skill needs) and recommends dyad/family programs, stronger recruitment and varied content and delivery options. *Wendy P. Nelson & Ronald F. Levant. (1991). An evaluation of a skills training program for parents in stepfamilies. Family Relations, 40, (3), 291-296.*

## TheoryBase

### Remarried Family Formation

Betty Carter and Monica McGoldrick (The changing family life cycle: A context for family therapy, Gardner, 1988) provide a developmental task framework widely used by therapists and educators:

#### STEP 1: Entering new bond PREREQUISITE ATTITUDES:

-Recovery from loss of first marriage (overcoming grief, guilt, anger, false longing)  
DEVELOPMENT ISSUES:  
-Recommitment; readiness to deal with ambiguity, complexity

#### STEP 2: Understanding and preparing for new marriage and family relationships PREREQUISITE ATTITUDES:

-Accept own, partner, children's fears about remarriage, family  
DEVELOPMENT ISSUES:  
-Cultivating openness in the face of pseudomutuality  
-Plan for emotional, financial, coparental responsibilities  
-Plan to help children deal with fears, loyalty conflicts  
-Establish new and maintain old extended family bonds

#### STEP 3: Remarriage and reconstitution of family PREREQUISITE ATTITUDES:

-Resolve prior attachments and ideal of intact family  
-Accept and cultivate healthy stepfamily, open boundaries  
DEVELOPMENT ISSUES:  
-Open relationships to allow inclusion of stepparent(s)  
-Make room for children with biological, non-custodial parent, grandparents  
-Begin developing traditions, experiences, bonds to build stepfamily identity

# Stats: Recreating Families

## *Distribution of Marriages by Marriage Order (Percent, USA/Wyoming, 1994)*

	1970	1980	1985
First marriage, bride and groom	68.6	56.2	54.1
First marriage bride/Remarriage groom	7.6	11.3	11.1
Remarriage bride/first marriage groom	7.3	9.8	11.4
Remarriage bride and groom	16.5	22.7	23.4

Source: Census Bureau. (1996). Statistical Abstract of the U.S., p. 105.

## *Distribution of Marriages by Age, Sex, and Previous Marital Status (Percent, USA, 1994)*

Remarriage	<20	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-44	45-64	65+
/F	1.7	15.3	24.4	20.6	20.8	14.3	2.9
/M	.6	8.0	19.9	21.7	31.3	16.0	2.7
Previous Divorce							
/F	1.7	16.7	26.5	22.5	21.6	10.0	.6
/M	.6	8.6	20.9	23.0	32.5	13.6	.6

Source: Census Bureau. (1996). Statistical Abstract of the U.S., p. 104.

## *First Marriage Dissolution and Years Until Remarriage for Females*

	ALL	1yr	2yr	3yr	4yr	5yr
1970-74	47.5	16.3	28.1	36.4	41.1	45.4
1980-84	56.8	20.6	32.8	40.7	46.2	49.7

Source: Census Bureau. (1996). Statistical Abstract of the U.S., p. 106.

*Stepchildren are more likely than biological children to live in lower-income families: 29% of children in intact families (vs. 39% of step-children) live in families with incomes under \$30,000*

*26% of children in intact families (vs. 24% of step-children) live in families with incomes over \$50,000*

*About 7 million stepparents live with their stepchildren (5 mil. stepfathers)*

Source: Jan Larsson. (1992). Understanding stepfamilies. *American Demographics*, 14, (7), 36-39, based on 1987 National Survey of Families and Households.

## *Clinical Perspectives: Predictors of Transition Difficulties for Remarried Families*

1. Wide discrepancy between family life cycles of blending families
2. Denial of prior loss and/or short time between marriages
3. Failure to resolve intense relationship issues of first family experience
4. Lack of awareness of emotional difficulties of children in remarriage
5. Inability to give up ideal of intact family and move on
6. Efforts to draw firm boundaries around new family
7. Exclusion of or combat with biological parent or grandparents
8. Denial of differences within the new household
9. Shift in custody of children near time of remarriage

Source: Betty Carter & Monica McGoldrick. (1988). *The Changing Family Life Cycle: A Framework for Family Therapy*. New York: Gardner, p. 409.

*When our relatives are at home, we have to think of all their good points or it would be impossible to endure them.*

--George Bernard Shaw

# Facts: Finding Yourself as a Family

## Stepping Through Predictable Stages of Adjustment

### Early Stages: Finding Yourself Together

STAGE 1: Fantasy: getting past hopes of biological parent reunion or nuclear family ideal to the work of blending unshared histories

**-Key Tasks:** Accepting that love is not instant, loss and strain are still present, stepfamilies are unique; Making real relationships work on a practical level (vs. comparing, idealizing, working too hard); Creating individual, couple, and parent-child time to relax and heal; Transitioning from single/parent to shared household roles

STAGE 2: Immersion: reality of new family structure sinks in, esp. for the "outsider" (stepparent marrying into biological parent-child)

**-Key Tasks:** Accept negative feelings of children (resentment, confused loyalties), biological parent (overload), stepparent (rejection); Taking time to talk out/work through adjustments; Support remarriage and parenting roles separately; Investing in positive experiences which moderate losses and disappointments, aid relaxing and togetherness

STAGE 3: Awareness: making sense of a unique family structure

**-Key Tasks:** Understanding and affirming personal feelings, experiences, roles of all members; Strengthening biological parent support for children/bridge to stepparent, ex-spouse, extended family; Beginning to find useful/affirming roles for stepparent; Creating family rituals and shared pleasures for continuity, cohesion

### Middle Stages: Beginning to Blend

STAGE 4: Mobilization: family, esp. couple, more openly airing difficulties between step and biological family needs

**-Key Tasks:** Giving up fantasies; Showing empathy for children's loyalty binds and stepparent "outsider" role; Prioritizing time and leadership for couple; Limiting impact of ex-spouse

STAGE 5: Action: negotiate new agreements about how the family will function; new boundaries around subsystems (couple, parenting)

**-Key Tasks:** Remove power struggles by emphasizing common ground; Allowing permeable boundaries (for transitions in and out); Finding constructive roles for stepparent, ex-spouse; Cultivating empathy and problem-solving skills

### Later Stages: Feeling Like a Family

STAGE 6: Contact: new areas of agreement w/easier functioning, authenticity, intimacy

**-Key Tasks:** Practice open communication which transforms blaming relations in conflict resolution and problem solving across biological subsystems; Expand and deepen nurturing parent roles, sibling bonds

STAGE 7: Resolution: practice of solid and reliable step relationships

**-Key Tasks:** Early identification and problem solving (w/appreciation of challenge, lower anxiety); Extended activities to build family identity and cooperation; Accepting losses and planning for long-term needs (shared child, college, retirement, extended family contact)

--"Fast" Transition: 4 years/"Typical" Transition: 7 years--

Source: Patricia Papernow. (1993). Becoming a Stepfamily. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

## Stepparenting that Works

1. Respect stepchild bonds with absent parent

**Competition with or put-downs on the same-sex parent strains a child's loyalties and erodes trust in the remarried family.**

2. Remarried partners must work together

**Understanding partner and child experiences as "insider" or**

**"outsider" and encouraging a blending which meets member needs is a learning process.**

3. Use differences as sources of strength

**A stepparent's new ideas, interests, or role may create conflict, but even that can be used to build understanding and family strengths.**

4. Make wise use of generational differences

**Playing the "friend" role may help build trust early, but "role model" and "teacher" relationships facilitate richer sharing across generations, without competition with absent parent.**

5. Negotiate comfortable roles with stepchildren

**Stepfamily closeness, roles, and discipline come from mutual negotiation and trust, not just stepparent preference or effort.**

6. "Intimate outsider" may fit better than "parent substitute"

**Instead of trying to replace an absent parent, a supportive but slightly more distant role may allow a stepparent to become a resource and confidant in time.**

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Cooperative Extension Service  
Human Development & Family  
Life 1/97**

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# just in time...

## TEACHING TOOLS FOR FAMILIES

### Transition Keys for Stepfamilies

#### Family Rituals

routine and repeated events with special meaning and order which build family identity and continuity in a changing world

*Stepfamilies can set a direction for acceptance, togetherness, problem-solving, and fun by their discipline of living together.*

#### Three levels of rituals

**Everyday:** regularities around mealtimes, bedtimes, discipline, leisure, transitions between homes which shape immediate security and growth

**Traditions:** weekly family times, summer vacations, extended activities (club participation), visits w/extended family, birthdays, anniversaries

**Celebrations:** major events marking cultural identity (religious or ethnic observances) or developmental change (weddings, births, entering new school, recognizing achievements or losses, funerals) and which define member status and connect family with the larger culture

#### Common Patterns of Remarried Kinship Networks (processes of family reorganization)

**Expanded**--sustained relationships with relatives from previous marriages plus current stepkin; open communication, extensive flexibility in roles and contact; inclusion vs. hostility

**Contracted**--segregation of family unit from major portions of kin network (i.e., ex-spouse/non-custodial parent, grandparents); restricted contact and communication or hostility between segregated parties

**Substituted**--new spouse/parent take places of those lost by death, desertion, divorce

What can you do to make a difference?

How can your everyday rituals help create a predictable and consistent pattern of events for children in transition?

-What adjustments will accommodate different ages and interests?

How can redecorating help create special places and memories for children to feel more at home in their new stepfamily?

-How can the experience of planning or working together build trust and cooperation among step-parents/siblings?

How will you handle conflicts between siblings or with parents?

-What ground rules will promote respect and problem solving?

-How can fairness and caring be experienced for all members?

What traditions are important to each unit of the stepfamily?

-Should this tradition continue as a separate or shared event?

-What role should other members have in supporting old traditions?

What new traditions would be fun and rewarding for our stepfamily?

-(How) should new traditions be timed to include all members?

-How could new traditions build self-esteem and togetherness?

-How can new rituals and traditions help us learn together?

What practical or emotional stresses come with approaching a major celebration, such as a wedding, as a stepfamily?

-How can we keep the focus on the person/event we want to celebrate so that our own tensions don't get in the way?

-How can we anticipate and negotiate events ahead of time in order to reduce tensions and create an enjoyable celebration?

How do our rituals keep us apart/bring us together?

Can we see ourselves in one of the kinship patterns described?

How do our connections (or separations) build the strengths of our stepfamily unit? How do they add (or drain) energy or loyalty?

What changes in our family rituals might allow us to make room for more of our extended family? What benefits might we gain from getting to know a larger group of our relatives?

## Keeping the Remarriage Flame Alive

***Remarried couples may carry the anxiety of dissappointing relationships, the optimism of a second chance, or the ambivalence of both experience***

## Handling (Step) sibling Conflicts

***Step-siblings face challenges of building new relationships with instant relatives find a new place***

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***Couples who make the most of their remarriage work on building...***

### ***Marital Strengths***

#### ***Communication and Conflict Resolution***

- Listening with respect and caring; taking turns in exchanging ideas and feelings
- Focusing on issues rather than blaming partner (or their child[ren])
- Affirming and problem-solving; avoiding sarcasm, defensiveness

## ***Special Remarriage Strengths***

### ***Genuineness***

- Honest sharing of feelings and concerns which overcomes fears of rejection, conflict, or breakup

### ***Cohesion***

- Couple unity which objectively works through conflicts, tensions, and distractions from children, relatives, ex-spouses

### ***Financial Wisdom***

- Realistic insights on financial needs and means, budgeting, and the meaning of money in family decisions

### ***Time Together***

- Routine and special times to retreat, refresh, and affirm the best possibilities of your chosen life together

***Several predictable steps can help resolve conflicts while they're still small and teach children how to work things out for themselves.***

### ***Acknowledge Feelings***

- When children know that their emotional experience is appreciated (without necessarily condoning actions), they tend to be more willing to cooperate on solutions which produce more cooperative relationships.

### ***Avoid Comparisons or Blame***

- Respect the individuality of each child and affirm his/her strengths (generally, as well as in difficult moments)
- Help each child focus on realities (i.e., shared room) and specific issues (i.e., privacy, shared toys) rather than arguing over things that can't be changed (i.e., family merger, custody arrangements) or general complaints (i.e., fairness)

### ***Redirect Hostile Energy into Positive Directions***

- Practical solutions such as "let's all clean up" and creative outlets like "draw a picture of your feelings" or "write a letter to your brother (sister)" can defuse emotions and focus children on positive choices.

### ***Coach Positive Behavior in the Face of Anger***

- Mediate while children express feelings, opinions in words (rather than fists)
- Guide children in brainstorming options for meeting each one's need, working together, showing respect, etc.
- Encourage the submissive child to assertively (firmly but respectfully) standing up to bullying behavior

Adapted from Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish. (1984). Siblings without Rivalry. New York: Avon.

# just in time...

## TEACHING TOOLS FOR FAMILIES

### Finances in Families of Remarriage

Financial and legal issues in remarriage can be complex, not only because more parties are involved, but because of the legal obligations, practical limits, and emotional issues involved in joining of two families. Each partner brings to the marriage past experiences, old spending habits, past assets and debts, and sometimes legal and financial duties outside the relationship.

#### **PRACTICAL ISSUES**

##### **Everyday Decisions**

Responsibilities for support and custody are generally outlined in divorce/custody agreements. However, a custodial parent may make financial decisions (i.e., medical emergencies, braces for teeth, summer camp), then request support from a non-custodial parent. Agreement to consult on shared cost items can reduce frustrations and aid cooperation.

##### **Legal Rights**

A stepparent has limited legal rights for care and custody of stepchildren. For routine activities such as authorizing release of school records or activities, a note from the biological non-custodial parent may suffice. For decisions involving substantial liability (i.e., medical treatments), a formal document granting limited power of attorney is advisable.

##### **Dependent Status**

Stepparents may or may not be viewed as dependents for employer fringe benefit purposes. Checking into coverage and/or necessary arrangements to gain coverage should be done early.

##### **Child Support**

In general, biological parents (married or not) are legally and financially obligated to support children to 18 years. Support agreements are legally binding, but locating or coercing a non-paying parent may cost more than the lost support. Also, periodic revisions of support agreements may help accommodate changes in ability to pay.

#### **RELATIONSHIP ISSUES**

Money is a practical resource, but may be easily and mistakenly substituted for interpersonal resources such as affection, belongingness, or control. Feelings of guilt or resentment over split obligations (stepfamily and non-custodial children) and anxiety about replaying discord with ex-spouse heightens the emotional tone of discussions on finances. Conflicts over values (i.e., saving or spending, needs and wants) are intertwined with money issues and reach to the foundations of the remarriage relationship. Children are in a powerful position to play one parent against the other to their advantage. Couples who take time to heal the hurts of prior marital conflict, discuss values related to money, and communicate about the deeper concerns (i.e., self-esteem, togetherness, responsibility) which underlie money issues are more likely to handle them well. Many couples find a counselor, mediator, or financial advisor may help clarify issues and develop skills to handle challenges cooperatively.

Adapted from Joyce E. Jones. (1996). Understanding financial and legal matters. In S. Olsen *Stepping Stones for Stepfamilies*. Manhattan, KS: KSU-CES.

For more insights on financial management education with remarried couples, consult J.M. Lown, J.R. McFadden, & S.M. Crossman. (1989). Family life education for remarriage: Focus on financial management. *Family Relations*, 38, (1), 40-45.

#### **University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service Human Development and Family Life, 1/97**

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## TEACHING TOOLS FOR FAMILIES

*When adult children remarry, their parents can become instant grandparents...or extend the number and variety of their grandparenting connections overnight. Step-grandparenting relationships come with the same challenges, uncertainties, conflicts, and rewards typical of other stepfamily relationships.*

### Stepping Stones for the Grandparent

**\*Remember that relationships are built over time.** Your relationship and role as a step-grandparent will take time to develop. Communication and time spent getting to know, understand, and respect, and trust grandchildren.

**\*Your relationship to biological and step-grandchildren will be affected by family changes.** Including "new" grandchildren can be affected by their loyalties, relationships to step-relatives, and may strain your relationship to the grandchild you've known since birth.

**\*Recognize the vital role of grandparents and step-grandparents in today's families.** A majority of families are busier than ever. Inter-generational contact extends nurturing for children and gives them more realistic and positive views of older adults and aging.

**\*Find special niches for caring.** Reassurance and attention from a caring adult can help children cope better with the uncertainties of stepfamily adjustment. Support for non-residential children during family visits can provide a special message of esteem and concern.

**\*Create a grandparenting role that is comfortable for you and rewarding for your stepfamily.** Grandparents enrich families through storytelling, child care, practical aid, listening, and a variety of other ways that fit their own personalities and family members' needs.

**\*Learn about your stepfamily to better understand where to fit.** Thinking about step-grandchildren's ages, interests, and relationships with peers and other family members will help you decide how to become involved with step-grandchildren. Remember that as they adjust and change, your opportunities with them will also change.

**\*Share yourself.** Spend time one-on-one with each child; teach a game or skill; share jokes or stories; listen for their concerns or stories; talk about parent/child or stepparent/stepchild disagreements but avoid criticism--they'll work it out; offer companionship; share family history and traditions; be a positive role model; accept them as they are and know that it may take time for them to reciprocate.

Adapted from "Stepping Stones for Stepfamilies (1996)" by Gayle Price and Charlotte Shoup Olson, Kansas State University CES. Self-study guides for parents are available and guides for grandparents will follow later this year. Contact Dr. Olsen at (913/ 532-5773).

**Grandparent relationships are more close and active for young adults in stepfamilies** according to a study by Drs. Gregory E. and C.E. Kennedy (*Journal of Remarriage & Divorce*, v.19, no. 3/4, 1993).

Step-grandchildren were significantly more likely than children of intact or single parent families to describe grandparents as "enjoyable...loving ...comfortable...showing pride...and supportive."

Stepgrandparents were no more likely to live in the same town, but typically

spent more time than peers--in a variety of activities--with the grandchild.

### ***You are a New Step-grandparent. What does this Mean?***

You probably have many thoughts and feelings about this role, including:

#I'm not old enough or ready to be a grandparent. I'm still raising my own children.

#This interferes with my feelings and dreams about the birth of my first grandchild.

#Will my step-grandchild like me? Will I like my step-grandchild?

#What are the expectations of my son-or daughter-in-law?

#The relationship I have with my other grandchildren is great. I don't want it to change.

#Is it OK to feel differently about my grandchildren than about my step-grandchildren?

#I feel like I'm expected to treat my step grandchildren the same as my grandchildren, especially around gift-giving

#Will "our" family celebrations and traditions have to change?

*These questions and thoughts often create feelings of resentment, frustration, uncertainty, sadness, loss, and confusion. Understanding the differences between stepfamilies and biological families may help you cope, adjust, accept, and define your role:*

***\*Stepfamilies do not find "instant love"***

***\*Stepfamilies are unique and not like first-time married families***

***\*Conflict and change are normal***

***\*Individuals in stepfamilies have different personal histories***

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## Catch the Wind: Programming Resources, Public Policy, Key Issues

### Programming Resources

--In addition to those cited above--

#### Stepfamily Ass'n. of America

www.human.cornell.edu/youthwork/  
215 Centennial Mall South, Suite 212,  
Lincoln, NE 68508 (800-735-0329 or  
402/ 477-7837). Widely acclaimed as  
the source for support groups and  
resources to help adults and children  
face challenges and build strengths.

#### Cornell Extension

##### Building Strong Stepfamilies

A seven-part letter series (1992) by  
Judith Winkler, Broome Co.

#### Iowa State Extension

Divorce Matters, a five-part series by  
Lesia Oesterreich (PM 1637-1641;  
1996). ISU Extension Distribution, 119  
Printing & Pub.Bldg., Iowa State Univ.,  
Ames, IA 50011-3171.

#### NC State Extension

Succeeding as a Stepfamily, by Sharyn  
Duffin (HE-398-1; 1993).

#### Maryland Extension

Stepparenting: Step by Step, by Billie  
Frazier (1990) can be acquired via  
Agricultural Duplicating Service, UW-  
CES, 6200 Sheridan St., Riverdale, MD  
20737.

#### The Stepfamily Solution

www.publiccom.com/web/stepkid  
c/o Elizabeth Einstein, P.O. Box 6760,  
Ithaca, NY 14851 (607) 272-2552. Sells  
commercial educational resources such  
as Strengthening Your Stepfamily goal-  
setting/communication curriculum.

#### Resources for Parents

#Burns, C. (1985). Stepmotherhood.  
NY: Times Books  
#Jolin, P. (1981). How to succeed as a  
stepparent. NY: Signet.  
#Rosin, M.B. (1987). Stepfathering:  
Stepfathers' advice on creating a new  
family. NY: Simon and Schuster.

#### Resources for Children

#Berman, C. (1982). What am I doing  
in a stepfamily? Secaucus, NJ: Lyle  
Stuart.--Good book for preschoolers  
#Bradley, B. (1982). Where do I  
belong? Reading, MA: Addison-  
Wesley.--Issues for grade schoolers

#### Resources for Adolescents

#Craven, L. (1982). Stepfamilies: New  
patterns of harmony. NY: Messner.  
#Hardner, R.A. (1982). The boys and

girls book about stepfamilies. NY:  
Bantam.--Comprehensive: kids, teens

#cited in Marilyn Coleman & Lawrence  
Ganong. (1989). Stepfamily self-help  
books: Brief annotations and ratings.  
Family Relations, 38, (1), 91-96.

### It's the Law:

#### Finding a Place for Step- relationships in Family Law

Family law often lacks clearly  
defined legal rights and duties for  
step-relationships (except via  
adoption). Areas of ambiguity  
include:

**Parent role:** Stepparent  
role not usually defined  
precisely; most  
recognize "in loco  
parentis" (functioning in  
place of a parent) or  
meeting "best interests  
of the child" principles interpreted  
by each court. This ambiguous and  
temporary status impede bonding  
with stepchildren.

**Child support:** Only a few states  
obligate stepchild support (usually  
not after dissolution of remarriage;  
or only as long as children live with  
stepparents)

**Visitation/Custody:** If divorce  
occurs in the remarriage, step-  
parents often have few rights for  
visiting or obtaining custody of non-  
biological children.

**Alternatives:** The English system  
provides for joint legal custody of  
step and custodial (biological)  
parent, flexibility in handling the  
variety of relations

Source: Mark Fine. (1989). A social science  
perspective on stepfamily law. Family Relations,  
38, (1), 53-58.

#### School Policies Make a Difference for Stepfamilies

*Why special sensitivity?*

\*Remarriage can be stressful

\*Abuse/neglect and school problems

more frequent in stepfamilies

\*School personnel need to appreciate  
stepfamily uniqueness

*Needed changes in views*

\*See ex-spouses as potentially  
cooperative vs hostile coparents

\*Recognize non-residential parent  
involvement at any level

\*Value additional parent figures

\*Appreciate extended family and  
friendsupport

*State Dep'ts./School Admin.*

\*Offer educational workshops on  
stepfamilies (in-service, recert.)

\*Review of policy and curricula for  
insensitivity

\*Analyze student data by family  
structure to track special needs

*District Administrators*

\*Discourage use of negative  
labels ("broken families")

\*Review policy for all families'  
convenience

\*Update family data, legal info

\*Offer report cards and con-  
ferences to custodial and non-  
residential parents

\*Include stepfamily books in  
libraries for children, parents

\*Sponsor support or educational  
groups for kids and families

\*Train against stepfamily bias *School  
Boards*

\*Seek input from all families

\*Set/maintain sensitive policies  
and professional service for all

*School Professionals*

\*Aid learning about stepfamilies

\*Identify and include key parent  
figures and student perspectives

\*Facilitate discussion and support  
groups

\*Develop effective referral and  
consulting networks

Source: Margaret Crosbie-Burnett & Ada Skyles.  
(1989). Stepchildren in school and colleges:  
Recommendations for educational policy changes.  
Family Relations, 38,(1), 59-64



**PARADOXES: A PARTING THOUGHT**  
*This Marriage Will be (the Solution to Our) Biggest Problems*

*A fresh start is all we need...Problems follow wherever you go*

*\*Stepfamilies often do find a fresh start, most likely after they've worked through past hurts and problems*

*He (she) needs a daddy (mommy)...But not like you*

*\*A caring stepparent can extend and enhance support, when a child is ready to accept and relate to him (her)*

*We'll be one big happy family...Or two small lonely families*

*\*Blending families (esp. after single-parent independence) doesn't happen instantly or without effort*

*We'll share our bills...We're as tight as ever and fight over money*

*\*Joining forces can relieve and strengthen each unit, but also brings many difficult issues to work out*

*This will help us heal our hurts...This only reopens the wounds*

*\*Love can heal wounds, but sometimes the process requires more pain, patience, and perseverance than expected*

*Our capacity to accept paradox,  
to cope with dilemmas,  
is the measure of our maturity  
and its expectable consequences.*

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