

# Parenting in Stepfamilies

**Stepfamily Scotland Helpline: 0845 122 8655**

Stepfamily Scotland understands that living in a stepfamily can sometimes be difficult and can involve challenges that other families do not have to deal with. Parents in stepfamilies call our helpline for support on a whole range of issues, some of which are outlined in this leaflet along with some tips that you might find useful. However you might also find that the information does not seem to fit with your family situation. If you would like further help with the issues affecting your family, you can call the Stepfamily Scotland Helpline. Our Helpline Workers will explore the issues facing your stepfamily and help you identify options that might work better for you.

## Family Traditions

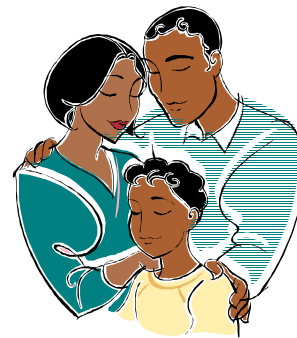
Habits and traditions familiar to one family but not to the other are put under a spotlight when two families join together. For example, meals can cause conflict if one family thinks it's important to sit down together at regular times but the other is used to being more flexible. Aim for a bit of give and take so that a compromise can be agreed upon.

Sometimes however you may find that, no matter how much you compromise, arguments still happen. Consider what feelings might be bubbling under the surface and getting in the way. Some children might feel like sacrificing the traditions that they have grown up with is being disloyal to their old family, and a criticism of how things used to be. If you can help them talk about their feelings, you might be able to find another way to handle their feelings.

## Contact Arrangements

Include the children in making all the big decisions that affect them and the family. However, taking their wishes into account is not the same as allowing them to make the big decisions. Ultimately it is your role as the adult to weigh up the pros and cons and make the final decision. Children like to be consulted, but asking them to make the final decision can make them feel stuck in the middle.

Avoid contact arrangements that mean they miss events that are important to them, such as a friend's birthday party or playing for a team. Also, be open to changing longstanding arrangements with your ex-partner. Sometimes a new partner or job will mean arrangements need to change and you will have a better chance of avoiding conflict if you can both compromise. If you need further help you could also consider family mediation. See the bottom of this leaflet for some useful contacts.



## Names

When two families join to form a stepfamily, you may find that there are several different surnames. It may seem a good idea for everyone to have the same surname, but names are an important part of a child's identity. The children had a history before their old families were separated, and it may continue to be important to them even if you want to put it behind you. Children won't settle in a new family any more quickly if others deny their past.

## Divided Loyalties

Respect a child's natural loyalty to their absent birth parent. Try to keep criticism of your ex or your partner's ex to yourself, and don't insist that the children call their new stepparent 'Mum' or 'Dad'. They will decide themselves if and when the time is right. Avoid setting up situations where your child has to choose between one parent or the other.

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[www.stepfamilyscotland.org.uk](http://www.stepfamilyscotland.org.uk)

### Feelings

As a parent you may feel angry and frustrated when, despite your best efforts, things go wrong. Try hard not to put the blame for your feelings onto your child/stepchild. Remember that they did not choose the new relationship or the new family, and rebelling may be their only way of dealing with their feelings of anger and loss.

You can help by giving individual quality time regularly to each child, your own and your stepchildren. A little time is better than none at all. It will give you a chance to find out what they are thinking and feeling, and what's important to them.

### Couple time

Be sure you and your partner take time to talk and listen to each other. There will be many pressures on you both. If children are resident with you, one of the difficulties you will face is the lack of privacy for developing your relationship. Unless you make firm arrangements for time together, alone, the children may get between you.

Above all remember that forming a new family takes patience, energy and courage. Don't expect miracles overnight and don't feel guilty when things go wrong. In one way or another, a stepfamily is based on loss; whether through separation, divorce, or bereavement. Loss of any kind takes time to get over, and can make it difficult to accept a new arrangement, so don't despair if it takes longer for your stepfamily to settle down than you expected.

**Stepfamily Scotland offers support and information to anyone in or related to a stepfamily. If you feel you need some additional support, or just need to talk to someone about some of these issues, then you can call the Stepfamily Scotland confidential Helpline and talk to one of our fully trained helpline workers. They are non-judgemental, will listen, and can help you explore your situation.**

**Stepfamily Scotland  
Gillis Centre  
113 Whitehouse Loan  
Edinburgh  
EH9 1BB**

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### Useful Contacts:

#### Family & Relationship Counselling

**Scottish Marriage Care**  
**Telephone: 0141 222 2166**  
[www.scottishmarriagecare.org](http://www.scottishmarriagecare.org)

Provide relationship counselling services throughout Scotland to couples or individuals who are married, living together, living apart, divorced or separated. They also provide counselling services to families who are living with conflict.

#### Family Mediation

**Family Mediation Scotland**  
**Telephone 0845 119 2020**  
[www.familymediationscotland.org.uk](http://www.familymediationscotland.org.uk)

Family mediation services enable separated parents to meet together with a trained mediator to achieve agreement on future parenting. Family mediation also provides contact centres across Scotland where non-resident parents can enjoy contact with their children where no other arrangements have succeeded.