

STEP-PARENTING

Children don't need perfect parents but responsive parents. We're halfway through my 12-part parenting series and you can catch-up online on my website. Here's what I've covered so far:

- Multitasking children and parents: Too often too much
- 30 questions to ask yourself and your child on your parenting style
- Self-care for parents: Spirituality
- Self-care for parents: Physical and psychological
- Self-care for parents: The social self

According to the Bureau of Statistics, about 52 per cent of divorce in Australia involves those with children and, naturally, step-parenting is a huge challenge for many families I work with. About one in 10 families in Australia are step-families with at least one child living in the house.

It has been assumed it was better for children from broken homes to have a step-parent because it offers greater financial stability and another authority figure. It would seem there are possible benefits of introducing a step-parent to the family, such as increased economic and parental resources, however, this might be counteracted by the stress related to

IT TAKES TIME AND PLENTY OF PATIENCE FOR CHILDREN TO ADJUST TO BREAK-UPS AND THE ARRIVAL OF STEP-PARENTS

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establishing a new family structure. Remarriage does not necessarily alleviate the negative effects of growing up with a single parent.

As you'd imagine, there's a plethora of advice about step-parenting, so I thought I'd highlight some myths included in the Prepare-Enrich online couple analysis resource I use:

- Our family members will blend well due to our love for each other.
- We will definitely enjoy a better marriage this time.
- Our children will be as excited about our new arrangement as we are.
- The stepchildren will naturally bond

with their step-parent over time.

The reality is, it does take time, along with plenty of patience and communication, for children to adjust to a new arrangement. Some will bond quicker than others and some can experience rejection and confusion, resulting in resentment. Take time to consider your role as the step-parent and to what extent your influence goes, such as discipline and responsibilities for their welfare. It has been noted that the first two years of settling into a blended family can be just as stressful as the first two years following a divorce.

The greatest challenge I notice is negative comments communicated from one

biological parent through the children to the other. As difficult as it can be to contain your feelings, I implore separated couples to avoid at all circumstances dragging down a part of their child by criticising their ex-partner in front of them. Your child did not ask for this change in circumstance and their well-being is your priority. It is incredibly sad to see children being over-informed before their age can process this.

Whilst we learn from our previous relationships, we can easily fall back into poor habits such as avoiding conflict or lack of communication. It's not uncommon to be easily triggered by a similar behaviour with the new partner. It's incredibly important to enjoy the benefit of past experience with the intention to be a better version of yourself, so ensure you've learnt from your own mistakes.

I stand in awe of the feedback from well-balanced adults who cherished the love and guidance from being raised by a step-parent. Blended families can work when you are adequately prepared for the realities.

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