



Top 10 tips for Step Parents to let you know you are not alone

Parenting is always a challenge at the best of times.

Stepparenting throws up challenges few realize.

Stepparenting, shared parenting, coparenting and blended families are becoming more and more common around the world. Feeling a little overwhelmed?

The odds are the majority of us have been through the particular challenge facing you now.

You are not alone, and these tips might just be the difference between you throwing it all in and instead staying the course.

1. Most of the advice you get about stepparenting and blended families comes from people who are not stepparents and who don't live in a stepfamily situation

People might mean well but in reality, taking stepparenting advice from someone who has never had stepchildren is like asking parenting advice from someone who has never had children. Remember they are not living your life or experiencing what you are. Surround yourself with knowledgeable people such as presenters at this summit.

2. As a stepparent, it is actually not your job to solve or fix your stepchildren

Sometimes just being there is enough but sometimes it isn't but if you do the best you possibly can from a good place in your heart that's all you can ever do.

3. Your stepfamily will never actually reach a point of absolute perfection

But remember, no family and no human being is perfect either. Strive for the best you can be but don't set yourself up for failure from the beginning by being unrealistic about certain things. If your partner has a high conflict ex, they are hardly going to invite you around for a cup of tea and cake. It may take years for the conflict to ease and it may also never ease. You can only do so much.

4. There is no one size fits all when it comes to stepparenting

What works in my situation may not work for you but remain open minded and be realistic about being willing to try and/or change your approach after advice from knowledgeable people and authors in this area.

5. As a stepparent try to be respectful at all times no matter how frustrated you are

Stepparents have often gone through being on the receiving end of the emotional blackmailing games played by their stepchildren's bio mom or dad. Do not buy into the bitterness of your partner's ex-partner. That is their issue to deal with, not yours. You need to rise above all this and remember that you can only control what you say, how you say it and when you say it. Your stepchildren are smarter than you realize and will respect you for not stooping such a level.

6. Stepparents should lead by example but at the same time not become a doormat

You may not like a member of your step or blended family and that is perfectly ok. But demonstrate respect towards that person. However, you need to accept that the person has a right to their opinion even if it is not shared by you. Make sure though that the person's opinion is based on fact and not lies. If it is based on lies, set the person straight with a calm, rational explanation.

7. You will never have all the answers to all the issues that crop up in stepparenting and blended families

But you don't need to have all the answers. Remember that by telling and sharing your story of how you have worked through and overcome what you are going through right now, it will actually become part of someone else's survival guide. A problem shared is a problem halved and you will find that the answers you are trying to find are trying to be found by everyone who is a parent too.

8. Talk to people about your feelings to avoid a "blow up" stage

Ideally, talking to your partner has to be the first step in helping you with any feelings or things you are struggling with. Perhaps you are being disrespected by your stepchildren behind your partner's back. Are there appropriate boundaries in place? Is the disciplining falling to you as a stepparent rather than to your partner? Not immediately "loving" your stepchildren or sometimes wishing they were not around on a particular weekend does not make you a bad stepparent. Plenty of parents often wish their children were not around some weekends too.

9. Stepparenting is not a competition

Sometimes some people need to be reminded of this. Stepparenting revolves around commitment, compromise, compassion and making that difference. Stepparents do not want to replace a biological parent. They are there to try and make a positive difference in a child's life.

10. If you have an agenda, other than wanting to just make a difference in your stepchild's life, you will fail spectacularly- and so you should

Your stepchild's relationship with your partner has been established long before you came onto the scene. Do not try and get in the middle of it. Do not try any Machiavellian tactics in order to gain an upper hand. Being a stepparent is about acknowledging that someone else's "happily ever after" had to end for you to have yours. A stepparent has to realize that their relationship with their partner cannot ever just be, "a boy meets girl" situation as "the boy" and "the girl" come complete with little human beings. It does not mean that the stepparent always comes second to their stepchildren, but it does mean that acknowledging all the above tips will help you in your journey in working out your role and hopefully allow you to have a more workable stepfamily situation.



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