

TIP SHEETS

AN 'OURS' BABY

The birth of a new baby in the stepfamily can bring about a surprising range of emotions for both adults and existing children. The overwhelming need to protect and nurture their baby can take a first time parent (stepparent) by surprise, particularly because it highlights lesser feelings they may have for their stepchildren. For an only child in particular, the baby's arrival may lead to feelings of jealousy and a sense of isolation. In contrast it can be easier when a stepparent becomes a biological parent, and they become an integral part of the stepfamily, with the baby acting as a link between family members.

See also [Children, Teenagers and Part-time Stepfamilies Tip Sheets](#).

EMOTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

Stepfamily members experience a range of emotions with the birth of an 'ours' baby.

Siblings may feel:

- excited that they are part of this new family
- left out, or unsure where their place in the stepfamily is now. An only child, in particular, can experience the arrival of a new baby as a very real threat
- unloved or jealous because they perceive the baby as being preferred over them, particularly if they only see the 'shared' parent on contact visits
- anger which might be misdirected or caused by other unresolved situations.

A new parent can feel:

- overwhelming love for the new baby
- fearful and protective lest stepsiblings hurt the baby
 - guilt over the lesser feelings held for stepchildren compared with the new baby
 - overwhelmed with their new role
 - anger over the financial obligations to their partner's former family

ONE IMPORTANT RULE

Reassure older children that they are loved and still equally important in your lives.

- protective of their new family (dad, mum and baby) and want to exclude stepchildren.

The stepparent in particular can hold unrealistic expectations for:

- the new family to function like a nuclear family without connections or commitments to a past family
- the new family to replace the old family.

A biological parent might expect:

- the new baby to hold the stepfamily together.

BASIC TIPS

- Don't make too much of a deal of the pregnancy with the children.
- Keep household routines as normal as possible.
- Prior to the baby's arrival, or soon afterwards, designate a separate playing space for older children. (Older children's toys may not be safe around a baby).
- Help half-siblings feel part of the event by finding a way to involve them.

WHERE TO GET FURTHER HELP:

Stepfamilies Australia: www.stepfamily.org.au

Family Relationships Advice Line: 1800 050 321

Family Relationships Online:
www.familyrelationships.gov.au

Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800 / www.kidshelp.com.au

Lifeline: 13 11 14

Men's Line Australia: 1300 789 978

Raising Children: www.raisingchildren.net.au

TIPS FOR AN 'OURS' BABY

- Prepare children in advance for the arrival of their new brother or sister. Ask them what changes they think will occur and how they feel, then reassure them. Let them help decorate the nursery or assist in choosing other baby items.
- If possible take the children into the hospital to visit their new half sibling, this helps them to feel included or have a small celebration the next time they come to stay.
- Help older children celebrate the birth by giving them a small present (maybe from the new baby).

- Do some activities in the original family group. This is likely to reduce any feelings of resentment towards the new baby:
 - i) With one set of children - they and their parent spend special time together, while the new parent has time with the baby
 - ii) With children on both sides - have grandparents or a friend to mind the baby while each parent spends time with their biological children.
- Accept as a stepparent that you will have different feelings for your baby compared to your feelings for your stepchildren, and that nonetheless stepchildren will continue to be part of your family. After all they are a half brother or sister to the baby.
- Make the most of what you have. Direct your attention to enjoying your new family with your baby and partner, rather than wasting energy on thinking your situation would be easier without past family and commitments.
- Accept that finances might be tight, and that you might feel like 'a second hand rose.' Give you and your baby a treat no matter how small.
- Encourage children to be part of the excitement by inviting them to help. If you are unsure about the baby's safety supervise their interactions with the baby. Be aware that a first time parent may have an exaggerated sense of the baby's fragility and little experience of how older children typically interact.
- New fathers can take an active role by providing emotional as well as practical support. Take the initiative to arrange a babysitter and spend some couple time together.
- If older children are willing and you are at ease, let them babysit for a short time.
- Continue to nurture all members of your stepfamily - your children, stepchildren, self, partner, the whole family.

LEARN MORE ABOUT STEPFAMILIES

- Educate yourself about the realities of stepfamily life - read books, attend stepfamily courses.
- Seek support, join a group for stepfamily members, talk to others who are familiar with stepfamily life.
- Get outside help if necessary. Make sure the counsellor is familiar with stepfamily dynamics.



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