

TIP SHEETS

PART-TIME STEPFAMILIES

One of the understated challenges for stepfamilies is managing the household and maintaining normal routines when children come and go on contact visits.

See also Children and Teenagers Tip Sheets

EMOTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

All members of the household are affected when children come on contact visits. Children who are part-time in the household can feel:

- Left out or lonely. This is particularly true for only children
- Jealous or resentful of (step/half) siblings who live in the household full time
- Overwhelmed with the large numbers of people in the household
- Out of place if he/she is a different gender from the children of the household
- Sadness when they leave to go to their other home
- Like invaders in others' territory.

Children who live in the household full time can feel:

- Jealous of the visiting (step/half) sibling who is perceived as getting special treatment
- Intruded upon, particularly when they share bedrooms

Adults can feel:

- Overwhelmed with the influx of children

ONE IMPORTANT RULE

Reassure children who come on access that they are loved and they will always have a place in your life.

- Out of their depth managing children they know little about.

Biological parents can feel:

- Sadness when dropping their child back to the other parent.

Some unrealistic expectations for part-time stepfamilies are:

- That this part-time stepfamily will function like a biological family
- Visiting children will fit in easily with the rules of the household
- That indulging children when they come on contact visits will make up for the times they miss with that parent.

BASIC TIPS

- Reassure children who are in the household full time that they are not forgotten or overlooked. Explain that children who live part-time in their stepfamily have the same rights as those who are full time members.
- Acknowledge that some children may lose their unique position in the family.

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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

BASIC TIPS CONTINUED

- Acknowledge the adjustments required of all family members, each time children come on contact visits. You may need to make some allowances for children who are not in the household full time.
- Make children's lives predictable by arranging regular access and sticking to it, except for the few special occasions when these arrangements need to change.
- Aim to be fair and treat all children the same. This means sticking to some basic family rules and not indulging children when they come on contact visits.

TIPS FOR PART-TIME STEPFAMILIES

- Children need some emotional space to adjust when they arrive and leave. You might notice they are more quiet or boisterous at these times. They might choose to listen to music in their bedroom, play outside, watch TV or not join in household activities for a while.
 - Accept that hand-over times don't always go smoothly. Make allowance for children being dropped off later than expected. Don't plan meals that are likely to spoil - have take away pasta or something you can reheat at the last minute.
 - Make the children feel part of the household by ensuring they have a personal space of their own. It is desirable for children to have their own room or bed. If you can only provide temporary sleeping arrangements, set aside a permanent spot for them such as a drawer where they can keep some of their special things.
 - Relationships need monitoring to ensure visiting children are neither over indulged nor left out. Aim for the biological parent to spend some time with his/her own children when they visit.
 - Have routines for visiting children. Don't treat them as visitors nor over burden them with responsibilities. Expect them to do some chores appropriate to their age, such as putting away toys and making their beds.
 - Encourage an only child to bring a friend or arrange for some cousins or children of friends to come and play.
- Involve children in making decisions that affect them. It can be empowering for children who live in the household part-time to feel they have some say in their stepfamily.
 - Contact the school and arrange for them to keep you informed about your child's progress and of any activities that require parental involvement.
 - If at all possible, allow children to pursue their normal activities such as keeping up with sports and musical commitments.
 - Be understanding if your teens have forgotten items such as clothing or homework. It can be difficult for them to plan ahead each time they visit.
 - Don't feel rejected if older children prefer to do things with friends rather than their family some weekends.



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