

Developmental psychology; step parenting, is it for you? essay

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With stepfamilies becoming a large part of the population here in the United States and all over the world, you would think we would have more understanding on how to be a good stepparent.

Knowing what role one will have to play when becoming a stepparent can be very difficult for all parties involved. Raising your own biological children is hard enough; now throw a few stepchildren into the mix and all hell breaks loose. Not literally, but some days it can feel like that. Successful stepfamilies take a lot of work; adults will balance the sanity with the physical and psychological needs of children who are not biologically related" (Lord, 2009).

Some major findings about children living in blended families as reported (Kreider, 2005) fifteen percent of children (10.6 million) lived in blended families in 2001. About half of these children, 5.1 million, lived with at least one stepparent. Background- Stepfamily dynamics Stepfamilies will face unique factors such as negotiating parenting roles between biological parents and stepparents. The relationship between stepparents and stepchildren can strain the quality of stepfamily couples. The dynamics of the cohabitating stepfamily may mimic married stepfamilies in the way in which family roles are assumed and in the financial and emotional contributions that are made to the other partners children.

Thus cohabitating may face some of the challenges faced by married stepfamilies (Stepfamilies in the United States: A Fact Sheet, 2009).

Stepfamilies differ from families in which both parents are the biological parents of the children because: (Stepfamilies in the United States: A Fact

Sheet, 2009) •Children are often members of two households. •Stepfamily members have different family histories. •Parent-child bonds are older than adult-partner (spousal) bonds. •Stepfamilies begin after many losses and changes. •Legal relationships between stepparent and stepchild are ambiguous or nonexistent. (Stepfamilies in the United States: A Fact Sheet, 2009)As divorce rates among couples with children has stabilized over the years, the children of these divorced parents and of single-parents has increased as more women are giving birth to children without being married or with the father of the child. Lord (2009) found that today between one-quarter and one-half of this country's children under 18 (about 20 million kids) live in a divorced, step, or blended family situation.

Forty-three percent of first marriages end in divorce; sixty-five percent of remarriages involve children of a prior marriage; and sixty percent of remarriages with kids ends in divorce. Lord, 2009) This means there are approximately eleven million single parents thinking about remarriage and the possibility of stepparenting. Blended Families When the decision is made to join two families into a blended family, you can only hope that everything is going to be great. Conflict will be minimal and you will all get along like a nuclear family. If you are lucky this will happen for the first couple of months. Common challenges for blended family parents vary from parent to parent but the following issues are common among most. Penton, 2007) 1)Being financially responsible for someone else's children. This can cause you and your partner to have conflicts over how to handle money.

2) Giving up control and care of personal and prized possessions. 3) Being responsible for someone else's children and the time that requires. 4) Dealing with ex-partners. This is a very real complicating factor in managing a life with a blended family. 5) Differences in family rituals.

6) Pre-existing family conflicts. 7) Loss of control of your house, rules, family culture, ect. 8) Stepsibling conflicts. 9) You experience resentment and unkindness from the stepchildren even though you have been unfailingly kind and respectful. 10) You don't care for the other family's discipline approach 11) Believing that because you partner's children are grown and out of the house they won't have an influence on your life and your relationship with your partner. There are many other issues in the complexity of stepfamilies in addition to the ones listed above; these are just an example of some of the most common issues (Penton, 2007).

Time and understanding are key allies in negotiating the transition into a stepfamily status. Lamanna, 1999) These few tips from Marriages and Families (pg. 472) can help with this particular challenge.

- Let your relationship with stepchildren develop gradually.
- Don't try to replace a lost parent; be an additional parent.
- Expect to deal with confusing feelings.
- Recognize that you may be compared to the absent parent.

• Discuss discipline • Admit that you need help if you need it. Stepfamily Development According to the text book Marriages and Families (Lamanna, 1999) there is a 7 Stage Model of Stepfamily Development. 1.

Fantasy—adults expect a quick adjustment while children expect that the step parent will disappear and their parents will be reunited. 2. Immersion—tension-producing conflict emerges between the stepfamily’s two biological “subunits.

” 3. Awareness—family members realize that their early fantasies are not becoming reality. 4. Mobilization—family members initiate efforts toward change. 5.

Action—remarried adults decide to form a solid alliance, family boundaries are better clarified, and there is more positive stepparent-stepchild interaction. . Contact—the stepparent becomes a significant adult family figure and the couple assumes more control. 7. Resolution—the stepfamily achieves integration and appreciates its unique identity as a stepfamily. The challenges of a remarried family with stepchildren can be that the stepchildren will have hostility.

After the age of 2 or 3 children will harbor fantasies of their parents reuniting, they may even go as far as to sabotage the new marriage to achieve that goal. (Lamanna, 1999)Debunking the Myth. Einstein and Albert (2006) found that myths are based on misperceptions and stereotypes, and in no way represents the real world. Myths are closely linked to expectations, and when the expectations are not met, the stepfamily may experience feelings of disappointment, inadequacy, and profound discouragement.

Our beliefs and expectations guide our attitude and affect our behavior; when we start with misconceptions or myths, we set ourselves up for

disappointment, and perhaps disaster. Some common stepfamily myths are far removed from reality: Myth: Stepfamilies should work just like traditional families. Reality: The stepfamily is a different kind of family; it doesn't function in the standard traditional way. Myth: Step parents are cruel and insensitive.

Reality: Stepparents share the same human qualities as other adults. Myth: A stepfamily is created instantly. Reality: While marriage vows or physically two families together into a single household create stability, becoming a happy, loving and functional stepfamily is a gradual, long term process. Myth: All stepfamily members should and will love one another. Reality: It takes time to build caring relationships. Myth: Stepfamilies formed after a death have fewer problems than those formed after a divorce.

Reality: All stepfamilies face challenges and painful feelings. Myth: Part-time stepfamilies have it easier than full-time stepfamilies. Reality: When children live between two homes, both families experience stress. There are probably as many myths about stepfamilies as there are stepfamilies. Accepting stepfamily myths – whether consciously or unconsciously – allows the unrealistic notions and misconceptions about stepfamily living to grow stronger, causing sadness, disappointment, and problems. The resulting disappointment can lead to defeat, and possibly to another divorce. (Einstein & Albert, 2006, pp. 21-25) Stepmothers Step mothers have had the myth as the “wicked stepmother” or “stepmonster” for generations.

“Unlike the bio-mom counterparts, stepmothers have no gestation period to get used to the idea of becoming a parent. There is no nine-month primer

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filled with congratulations and grandmotherly advice, no strangers patting your tummy or time-tested counsel from Dr. Spock. There are no stepmother showers, no books with chatty stepmother advice. Instead we go into the role blindly, without any tutelage from friends, books or doctors" (Bjornsen, 2005). As a stepmother myself I have learned that these myths are just that, myths.

I first became a stepmother at the age of twenty-one. I had recently gotten married. I had a child that was three years old, and everything was going good. I knew that my husband at the time (divorced 10 years ago) had three children from his first marriage. His son who was seven years old lived with his grandparents. The two girls' ages three and four lived with their mother after their divorce. To make a long story short, six months into our marriage, his ex-wife decided she didn't want their children anymore and left them with relatives in another state.

Next thing I knew he had custody of his three children, plus I had a daughter who had just turned four years old. I knew that my new role in the family was to be their stepmother. I was reluctant at first for these children to call me "MOM" but they said that they wanted to, so they did. I treated these children like they were my own flesh and blood.

I can't remember ever hearing things like "you are not my mom" or any degrading, hateful remarks like some of the stories I have read about children with stepmothers. Today I would have to say that I had a great experience as a stepmother raising three stepchildren as my own. In fact all three of the children still call me "mom" and we do all the holidays together

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(they are all adults now) even after the divorce of their dad and I. Not all stepmothers have the same experience. Now that all of my children are all adults I have joined into another stepfamily. I now see how some stepmothers could be accused of being the "wicked stepmother" my stepdaughter now, thinks of me that way sometimes.

My boyfriend and I cohabit with each other and he has a fourteen year old daughter from his previous marriage. I have lived with them since she was seven. I now see the other side of being a stepmother with the bio-mother also involved with the picture. It is much more difficult for me to just fall into my role as the mother. I now have to deal with the "that's not how my mom does it" or "my mom said I could" phrases from my stepdaughter. My favorite saying is "well, whatever, my mom lets me do that."

We then remind her that she is not at her mother's house, and we have certain rules that she must follow at our house, like not eating in the living room while watching television. I have found that as long as her father and I are united about the rules of the house she seems to be okay with it, but if it is just me setting a rule she will fight it tooth and nail. Also in my research I read about how children will be against their parent (mother or father) dating someone after the divorce.

It was true for a while during the early stages of my relationship, I can remember the very first time I went to their house for dinner, and met my soon to be stepdaughter. The first thing she did when her father left the room with her and I alone, she started kicking me, she was only seven so I just let it go, but after doing some research, I was told it was because she

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wasn't wanting anyone to take her daddy away from her, She was in that stage of thinking her mom and dad would eventually get back together. This took her a few years to finally get over the fact that her mom and dad were never going to get back together. I guess I would have to say the role played by a stepmother has to be taken very seriously, and knowing that you could be construed as a "wicked stepmother" is always going to follow you, and accept that while also knowing that most of the time you stepchildren will grow up and love you almost as much as their bio-mom. The information provided in this research paper is just touching on the basics of becoming a stepfamily.

The information that is available is overwhelming and plentiful for those who wish to do their homework before jumping into a relationship that might turn into a stepfamily situation. References Bjornsen, S. (2005). Stepmotherhood.

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