

Stepfamilies



TIPS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

What is a family?

We often think and talk about “family” as if there is one singular experience or family form – even though there is so much variation in the types and experiences of family.

- Some families have children and some don't
- Some families have adopted, fostered or have step-children.
- Some families have a mum and a dad, some have two dads or two mums.
- Some families have co-parents, some have one parent
- Some families include grandparents and other extended family members, and some have kinship, blended or intergenerational families.
- Some families change over time in response to life events such as divorce, remarriage, migration, and children leaving the parental home.



Research indicates that it's actually the quality of parenting relationships that determines children's wellbeing, rather than the form or structure a family takes (Dempsey, D; 2013 AIFS).

That is, it's not who is in your family that counts, but the relationship between you and your parents or caregivers.

'You're not my mum/dad'

So, your parent has just told you that their partner will be moving into your house.

You might have known them for a while, or you might have just recently met them. You might have gotten to know them really well and enjoy their company. You might have paid very little attention to them because you are having so much fun with your own friends, or they may actively irritate you and you tend to leave the house when they visit.

Whatever the circumstances, becoming part of a stepfamily is a major life change.

Some normal feelings you might experience include:

Hanging onto hope

You may have been hanging onto hope that your parents would still get back together, and therefore be feeling really sad and/or angry.

Too much change

You might have really begun to enjoy the special time you had living alone with your parent after the separation. You have just got used to adjusting to the loss of your family, and now you have to get used to the loss of living alone with your parent.

Uncomfortable and resentful

Suddenly you wake up in the morning and your parent's partner is in the kitchen making breakfast or taking up precious time in the bathroom. It is entirely normal for you to feel uncomfortable about this.

Mixed feelings

You might appreciate that your parent has a right to find love, but not be the biggest fan of their new partner or of their partner's kids. You didn't pick them and now you have to live with them!

Although all these feelings are normal, you still have to adjust to them, and it's not helpful if you avoid, resist or fight them.

Relationships Australia
VICTORIA

Activity

Try to think of:

- three things you enjoy about having your step-parent/sibling around
 - three ways you wish your relationship with your step-parent/sibling was different
 - three ways that YOU could improve your relationship with your step-parent/sibling.
-



Seven tips for living with your step-parent/siblings

1. Have a positive attitude. Try to find something you like about your parent's partner, maybe a shared interest.
2. Don't expect to like your step-parent straight away. It takes time to get to know someone and even longer to build up trust.
3. Assume that your step-parent is a nice person and wants to get to know you.
4. Cut them some slack – they are also adjusting to suddenly having to live with you.
5. Make sure your parent has spoken to you about how much authority your step-parent will have over you, if any.
6. Hopefully your parent has been smart and read up on the 'do's and don'ts' of starting a step-family, or they may have been to a [Stepfamilies Australia](https://stepfamily.org.au) parenting group. To find out more, visit <https://stepfamily.org.au>
7. Ask for what you want and need. You may not get everything you ask for but at least your parent will know what is on your mind. You might, for example, want to have one night of the week as special time with your parent.

What most young people say eventually happens:

- Once they get to know their step-sibling, they like having them around to do more fun things with.
- They like seeing their parent happier in a relationship.
- Their standard of living is better, because there is more money coming into the household.
- They like living in a bigger family.
- Once they get to know their step-parent, some young people say that it is good having more adults to share things with.

Need more help?

Remember that you don't have to deal with things on your own.

If any of the information we've talked about here has concerned you, or you'd like to chat to someone about what's going on for you, help is available.

You can start by talking to a trusted adult such as a parent, carer, family member, teacher or school counsellor and telling them how you're feeling.

If you feel unsafe at any time, call 000 (triple zero). For 24/7 support, call Lifeline on 13 11 14.

To make an appointment to chat to one of our counsellors, visit www.rav.org.au/counselling

To find other organisations that can help, visit www.rav.org.au/resources/youth-services

About us

Relationships Australia Victoria has over 70 years' experience providing family and relationship support services across Melbourne and Victoria.

We are committed to providing safe, inclusive and accessible services for all people.



We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners of the lands and waterways of Australia and we support Aboriginal people's right to self-determination and culturally safe services.

We recognise the lifelong impacts of childhood trauma.

We recognise those who had children taken away from them.