



News you can use...from your EAP

Strengthening your stepfamily

Half of all Americans are now a member of a stepfamily, including over 20 million stepparents. Tragically, 60 to 70 percent of all stepfamilies end in divorce within ten years. Long-term re-marital and stepfamily success is possible, however. Educating yourself about stepfamilies and developing your relationship and conflict resolution skills is the key. The following guidelines will help you strengthen your stepfamily:

Guidelines for stepfamilies

- 1. Put your relationship first.** Developing and enjoying yourselves as a couple is of prime importance, not only for you, but also for your children. In a stepfamily, as in any two-parent family, the strength of the couple's relationship is crucial for the continuing existence of the stepfamily, and therefore, is vitally important for the children as well.
- 2. Be realistic with your expectations.** Expect conflict and difficulties within your stepfamily. Blending the lives and emotions of several people into a new family is immensely difficult and complex. Parents, stepparents and their children are typically struggling with disappointment, guilt, divided loyalties, jealousy, rejection, fear, anger and their resulting negative behaviors. Acknowledging that conflict within your stepfamily exists is the first step in finding ways to solve problems and begin healing complex emotions.
- 3. Define parenting roles clearly.** Step parenting is usually more successful if stepparents carve out a role for themselves that is different from, and does not compete with, the biological parents. Until children and adults have developed a rapport, most couples find it best for each biological parent to handle primary discipline issues with his or her own children.
- 4. Learn to problem solve effectively.** Yes, conflicts are inevitable. The key is whether these conflicts get resolved positively and amicably or whether stepfamily members argue destructively, hold on to resentments, become emotionally distant and/or leave. People who create successful stepfamilies are skilled at managing conflict. Check your communication skills. Are you listening to the things your spouse considers important, or are you tuning them out? What about the feelings or important issues of your children, stepchildren, and ex-spouse?

Your EAP is here to help

To obtain no cost counseling or other EAP services, please call **800-869-0276**, or securely request services from the Member Access section of the EAP website: www.eapconsultants.com

