



CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION
A SAMHSA Supported Drug-Free Community Coalition
Led By Centre County Drug and Alcohol



ARTICLE 18 – July 16, 2008 – Step Parenting

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A man, with three charming boys and a woman, with three beautiful girls, fell in love. With a hunch that this bunch must somehow form a family, they married. As a blended family, they instantly shared love and respect. Many parents hope to build the same cohesive family unit and loving relationship with stepchildren as the sitcom family, the Bradys. However, forming a happy family may not be as easy as it is on television.

Investing in step relationships can provide youth with another caring bond that helps promote positive development. During formation of the new family, youth may deal with three primary emotions - loss, loyalty and lack of control. Many struggle with the loss of a parent from death or a first marriage and they may feel "caught in the middle" between the birth parents with conflicting feelings of loyalty. They also may feel that they are losing their parent to a new spouse. In their new family, youth must adjust to many changes - rules and routines, sharing their parent's attention, new siblings, respecting a new parent. This can leave a youth feeling out of control and uncertain about their role in the family. A variety of emotions can result, including anger, hostility, guilt, frustration, and betrayal. It is important to reassure children that they are loved and valued.

It takes time and effort to create a cohesive blended family unit. Following these tips can help:

Be Patient & Prepared: Spend time discussing beliefs about discipline, rules and other issues related to child-rearing. By discussing issues, partners will be prepared to cope with new family dynamics. It can take years for bonding to occur in stepfamily relationships. Patience and acknowledging and respecting feelings can ease the stress.

Time Together: One-on-one time takes on an even greater importance in stepfamilies. Giving undivided attention for a few minutes every day lets youth know they are still special. Stepparents also need to plan time with their stepchildren as these special times nurture the new relationship.

Consistent Discipline: Ease into the stepparent role by focusing on building a friendship with stepchildren. Early in the transition, the biological parent should assume most of the discipline as children accept guidance more readily from someone they trust and love. Together, the couple should discuss and decide upon expectations, rules, and consequences. Then, youth will learn that the family's rules are mutually agreed upon and that they are accountable to both parents.

Communicate: Parents should listen and be sensitive to behaviors that may indicate emotional concerns. In addition, holding family meetings provides a time for communication and involves all in decision-making. Remember to end each meeting with a fun activity or treat!

Seek Resources: Read books and articles. Visit the National Step Family Resource Center online. Talk to other stepparents. When needed, get outside help.

Respect Co-Parents: The stepparent relationship does not replace that of other biological parents. Co-parent with the shared goal of having your youth grow into a healthy and happy young adult.

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