



## **The Power of Respect: Stepparent**

“...easing the transition when a stepparent enters?”

“In this column the reader is offered practical, respectful options leading to win-win solutions to the problems arising between adults and children in everyday life.”

**Q: “Do you have any suggestions for easing the transition when a stepparent enters?”**  
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**A:** First, let’s get rid of the label, “stepparent.” It carries too many unpleasant associations. Along with the label, let’s get rid of any of the traditional obligations of someone in this role, like being an instant parent.

Let’s think of your new partner as a new member of the household, perhaps even a new family member.

Preparation before all are living together can make the difference between a smooth, enjoyable, enriching experience and a rough and unpleasant one.

Before your partner moves in, talk with your children, even if they are babies, and certainly if they are older, about this new member of the household.

Tell them that you want this to go well for everyone, so you’d like to know how they feel and think about this and any needs they have in connection with this situation.

Keep communication open. Be sure to negotiate any differences. If they want to, and if it is possible, let the children get to know your new partner before he or she moves in.

Be sure that your new partner understands and accepts the practices involved in discovering win-win solutions. Using these techniques to solve difficulties between the two of you is an effective and influential means of demonstrating this cooperative approach.

It’s a great want to learn the value of the skills of sharing feelings, thoughts, and needs, active listening, brainstorming, and negotiation. This experience and practice, before entering the household, can make all the difference.

Then they can enter the household respectfully, doing their best to cooperate and create a harmonious relationship with each child.

**As the new partner**, if you are already respectful to children, but your new partner is not a respectful parent, you can introduce this to the family.

Be sure that everyone understands that this is how you plan to interact with them so that you can all get along together.

If you truly want to take up the role of parent, or stepparent, remember that parents are models: treat the children as you would like to be treated.

- If you want the children to speak politely to you, speak politely to them.
- If you want the children to take your needs into account, take their needs into account, first.

When a child is not yet ready to be friends with you, don't let that child feel wrong, or pressured to be different. That could make them more likely to resist changing.

Only when and if they want to be friends can you develop a friendship. You might never be able to completely enjoy each other's company. That happens.

However, since you do live in the same house, it is important that you do your best to work cooperatively, showing respect when you are together and finding win-win solutions to your problems.

For the sake of everyone in the family, at least one family member needs to take the responsibility for making sure that the family works as harmoniously as possible:

- that interactions are as respectful as possible;
- that people cooperate as much as possible;
- that someone is a living example of respectful behavior.

During a negotiating session when every family member's needs are taken into account, realize that it does not mean that simultaneous needs have the same weight.

For example, the need you and your new partner have to live together might be so great, that it is something you do not give up at the negotiating table. You might give up other things:

- your children might decide to live with the other parent or friends
- maybe you agree to wait to live together until everyone is comfortable with the situation, or until Thanksgiving
- maybe for a while, you both spend part of your time at your partner's home and part of your time at yours.

However it gets worked out, as always, the important thing is agreement, finding the solutions that are agreeable to all concerned. Even if it takes time, things will be more harmonious than if you do not make the effort.