



# Step carefully to create family unity

**T**HE number of step-families has never been higher. Government statistics show a rising divorce rate, with 55 per cent of these couples having children under the age of 16. Thirty percent of divorced women go on to live with or marry another partner, which means an increasing number face the highs and lows of creating a successful step-family.

If you are about to merge two families, or have recently done so, here are some things to think about.

If it's the beginning of your new relationship you and your partner will probably be feeling warm and romantic about the prospect of being together. The last thing on your minds may be the nitty gritty of shared living and all the practical details that go along with it. However planning can make your new step-family an easier situation to live in.

First of all ask yourselves the question: "How are we going to make the time and space to keep our relationship going at the same time as getting the family settled in together?"



By Claire Halsey  
— consultant  
psychologist working  
with First Steps  
Psychological Service in  
Sure Start and the  
Children's Fund

Your relationship offers stability for everyone, and sets the tone for your home so avoid letting it 'coast' while you get the children settled.

Much of your energy will go into making the new family work, and will revolve around your and your partner's children. As you move in together you will need time to adjust to your new partnership as it can seem as if your relationship has had to "fast forward" through the usual "pre-children" phase. Balance this with finding time to reassure and

support your children to avoid someone feeling left out or neglected.

Take a close look at how realistic your expectations are. It would be very unusual if you all bond together immediately and never disagree. In any family there are arguments, differences of opinion and times when you may love each other, but liking each other is another thing. Be ready for these disagreements. Talk over together how you will handle the issues specific to your step-family.

For instance, if the only children in the new step-family are yours, you may feel that you should be the one to make everything work. Try to share this responsibility, and this will help the step-parent really become one of the family.

If your partner has no children, he or she may be irritated by having them around at first, so you may try to compensate for this by being over-protective of the children or your partner. Bring this issue out into the open and discuss it.

When times are difficult remember this may simply be because you're in a family and family members don't always get on, not all the issues are about being a step family.

#### Parents' tip:

Deb, mother of Rob, aged 14, Fin, aged 16 and step mother of Tom, aged 15, of Madeley, says: "We talked with the children to keep them informed of what we were doing, we didn't rush. We gave them time to get used to the idea, although moving in together was their idea in the first place."

THR

L. P...

L. P...

L. P...

W  
W  
TH  
KI

Fre  
San  
W