

## Five Discipline Tips For Step-Parents

Are you a step-parent in a blended family? Are your spouse's children having difficulty adjusting to this new situation? Or have you been blended for a long time and things just aren't going well? Have you heard the kids say, "You aren't my dad/mom, and I don't have to listen to you!" or worse, do the kids just ignore what you have to say?

Did you know that at least one-third of all children in the U.S. will live in a step-family before the age of 18? (Larson, J (1992), Understanding stepfamilies, American Demographics 14, 360).

Before I share these tips with you, I want to spend a little time talking about preparation. Second marriages sometimes bring up questions and issues for children. You may have noticed that the kids are acting out or retreating to their rooms. Children of divorce often times have fantasies that their biological parents will get back together. Once you introduce the idea of a remarriage those fantasies are confronted. It is important to recognize this and open up a discussion with the children. It is also a good idea for you and your spouse to decide how you will handle discipline before you live together or marry.

So no matter if you are a new step parent or have been hitting your head against the wall for what seems like years, take a deep breath and try these 5 tips.

Tip #1

### **Step Parent as Uncle/Aunt, Friend, Coach**

As a new step parent, you have your job cut out for you. In the beginning, take a step back and see yourself as needing to connect with the children rather than disciplining them. In the beginning, let the children's biological parent handle the correcting, reprimanding, etc. Work on creating a close relationship with these new children in your life. Do this until the children have accepted you. Even if you have been blended for years, take a step back.

Tip # 2

### **Stay Neutral**

Don't get pulled into a debate between your spouse and their child about a behavior. Let your spouse handle the situation. Only join in when/if your spouse asks for your help.

Tip #3

### **Get a Hobby**

Allow your spouse to have "alone/special time with their children. The kids need this and your marital relationship needs this, too. There is plenty of time for family time. Let the kids know that you are not taking their mom or dad away from them.

Tip #4

### **Offer Help**

Offer your help to the children in areas of homework, sports, problem solving. Even if they turn you down, don't retreat. Let the kids know that you are available if they have a problem or need help.

Tip #5

## **Family Meeting**

Once you have bonded with the children you can begin sharing some of the discipline with your spouse. With your spouse, set up a few house rules and consequences and share these with the kids in a family meeting. Simple rules such as no hitting and chores and homework must be completed before TV, computer and play. If they break one of these rules while you are in charge, you can say, "well this is the rule of the house and you know the consequence." This takes you out of the middle. It also makes you and your spouse a united front.

## **About the Author**

Susan P. Epstein, LCSW, Parent Life Coach, works with parents looking to get control of their family life. She practiced psychotherapy for 23 years before becoming a coach, writer and speaker. An expert in the areas of family dynamics, parenting and child development, Susan will uncover and unleash your parenting power. You can read more of Susan's parenting articles, and the special report 'Take Back Your Parenting Power' at Susan's website <http://www.ParentingPowers.com>