

Relationship Rehab Show

Episode 46: The Emotional Challenges of Step-Parenting

Being a step-parent is one of the most emotionally challenging roles on this planet! This is one place to sign-up for intensive personal growth! Why?

ONE: You are taking on a role for which there is no prior training. It's a lot like having a baby without any experience, but you come into the job with it already part-way done. If you're fortunate, you meet your step-child at an early enough age that bonding can take place relatively quickly. But even then, you didn't conceive or give birth to this toddler. So, give yourself plenty of time and patience for an emotional bond to grow between you. Even that may be interrupted by the continued involvement of that child's other birth parent. If the birth parent is involved, do NOT try to become "the parent" but a loving, respectful support to both birth parents in their desire to co-parent their biological child.

TWO: When you enter the picture when a child is a bit older, your role, again, is determined by the degree of involvement of the absent birth parent. Whether or not the absent birth parent is involved, the child will dictate how close the bond becomes with you. It's safest if you assume you will not be seen as a "real" parent, but perhaps even a resented interloper for the "real" mom or dad. Therefore, the

parenting decisions must be left with the biological parents. Your decision making will be minimal in regard to this child.

THREE: This means that you are an adult, living in a household with children over whom you have little or no control. The House Rules exercise gives you a chance to negotiate with your partner regarding a few house rules that are absolute essentials for you to be happy. House Rules are attached to this download. As long as you and your partner agree on house rules, and post them with appropriate consequences when they are violated, then both of you can enforce them.

EMOTIONAL CHALLENGES: (1) Taking a back seat to a partner's former spouse in regard to parenting decisions. (2) Having a current relationship with a partner who has "history" with a different person. (3) Often needing to make decisions that are in the best interests of the child rather than doing what you want to do. (4) Waiting a long time, if ever, for that child to perceive you as a valuable resource in his/her life rather than an enemy. (5) Needing to navigate through a minefield of resentments from the family of your partner's Ex. (6) A lifetime of attending events with your step-child's "other" family. (7) Learning to support your partner through difficult times with an Ex and perhaps a difficult child when you didn't fully realize that they came with the package of this new love. (8) Learning a deeper meanings of love and commitment that make you a better version of yourself.

You have my love and support! It's worth it!

Nancy Landrum

The Stepfamily-Five House Rules to Reduce Conflict

Directions: Each partner separately check off the five rules (or certainly less than ten) that are your “must have” or “can’t possibly live without” conditions for surviving in your home. Other rules you may enforce with your own child if they are important to you, but those rules are not imposed on the whole family.



His: Hers:

- We make major decisions as a family: Family Meetings
- Everyone here for a sit-down dinner.
- Chores done before recreational activities on Saturdays.
- Everyone observes the “knock and wait for permission to enter” rule.
- Modest dress outside your bedroom.
- Monday (or some other night) is dinner and game night.
- No cursing or foul language.
- Everyone says “please” and “thank you.”
- No “borrowing” (clothes, jewelry, equipment, money) without permission.
- No children in the Master Bedroom.
- No talking back.
- No hitting.
- No TV until homework finished.
- TV watching and video games limited to ___/day.
- Everyone over 12 years old or older does their own laundry.
- Everyone busses their own dirty dishes.

- ___ ___ Bed made every day.
- ___ ___ Towels always hung up after a bath.
- ___ ___ Everyone pitches in for Saturday chores.
- ___ ___ Chew with your mouth closed.
- ___ ___ No food in the living room.
- ___ ___ Everyone busses their own dishes. No dishes left in the sink.
- ___ ___ No fussing about bedtime.
- ___ ___ Curfews obeyed.
- ___ ___ Everyone in church once/week.
- ___ ___ ___minute limit on phone calls.
- ___ ___ School attendance. Homework done by ___.
- ___ ___ Once/day baths.
- ___ ___ _____

Step 1. Make a date to compare your “must have” rules. Do you have rules that over-lap? Are they very different? Have a respectful discussion about these options until you can pare the list down to under ten rules that will be expected of every family member including yourselves. This may take several sessions! The effort will be worth it in reducing conflict and confusion.

Step 2. Circle or highlight the rules you both agree on for the Stepfamily Five.

Step 3. Decide on the consequences for violation of each of the rules. (The consequences may be different for each child depending on what motivates each child or the consequences may be the same for all. It’s up to you! OR, you can ask the children what they think the consequences should be like Sherman and Alexa did!)

Step 4. Decide who will post the rules and consequences in a place where everyone in the family will see them regularly. (The frig?)

Step 5. Build trust and reduce conflict by keeping your agreements: enforce rules and consequences for your child.

Step 6. If your spouse fails to enforce the rules with his/her child, ask for a respectful discussion. Share your feelings. Renegotiate or recommit to the rules.

Step 7. Individually decide if there are additional things that you will expect of your child, but is up to your spouse to decide on for his/her child. (Review how Kip and Wendy handled this issue with their children.)

Suggestion: Make your 1st house rule that when the stepparent is in charge he/she has the bio-parent's full authority to enforce agreed upon consequences when the bio-parent is not at home.

Stumbling Blocks to Managing House Rules:

- ___ Insisting that my rules are the best or must be the only rules for everyone.
- ___ Displaying judgment about my spouse's "too strict" or "too lenient" rules.
- ___ Being condescending because my rules for my children are "better" than the other's.
- ___ Criticizing or belittling my partner's rules to my children or step-children.
- ___ Making too many house rules.

Building Blocks for Managing House Rules:

- ___ Consistently enforcing the agreed upon house rules with my children.
- ___ Accepting that we may have different values or perspectives about rules for children.

_____ Expecting my child to live by the guidelines I believe are best for him/her, whether or not the same things are expected of my stepchild.

_____ Enforcing rules with my stepchild only when my spouse is not present and I have permission.

_____ Keeping house rules as simple and basic as possible.

“I think there are a lot of couples out there who think that there must be only one way to handle all the kids. *One way* can be that there are *two ways* under the same roof. We make it work because *we don't judge each other's methods of handling our respective children and we work together on the issues that affect everyone*. Our kids, even the ones with the same biology, have different personalities and require different things. It's OK to have different systems.” From an interview with step-couple, Kip and Wendy

House Rules is copied from **Stepping TwoGether: Building a Strong Stepfamily** by Nancy Landrum, with Mary Ortwein Available as paperback and audio book on Amazon.com.

www.RelationshipRehabCoach.com