

Stepfamily challenges? Guidance is available online

Three months ago, I married a man with two children, 13 and 15, from a previous marriage. I thought by now things would be easier, but we still seem to be having trouble figuring out how to build our new family. Where can I find some guidance?

First, don't be too hard on yourself. You have stepped into a difficult role — one that will have its ups and downs over the years. Stepfamily relationships are distinctly different from traditional families, and it's not easy to know how to act and react in every situation.

The National Stepfamily Resource Center, a division of Auburn University's Center for Children, Youth, and Families, offers sound guidance on its website, <http://www.stepfamilies.info>. It offers research summaries and reviews of books on stepfamilies, as well as information and articles from past issues of the newsletter *Stepfamilies*, a publication of the now-disbanded Stepfamilies Association of America.

Most research indicates that older children tend to have a harder time adapting to the new stepfamily situation than younger children. Given the ages of your stepchildren, you may be especially interested in reading "Step teens: Issues of Control" on the national center's website. It offers some insight into figuring out what a stepparent does and does not have control over. One clue that you're having control problems is if you keep trying to "solve" something but always feel helpless and defeated. If that's the case, you're focusing on something you really have no control over.



Instead, turn your attention to things you can control — your reactions to situations, your communication strategies, your marital relationship.

Another source of guidance and information on healthy stepfamilies is a new offering from Ohio State University Extension, the "Stepfamilies Today" blog (<http://stepfamilies-today.wordpress.com/>). The blog, which began in May 2010, addresses a variety of issues involved in stepfamilies, including finances, discipline and relationships, and offers the opportunity for readers to post comments.

In one article, the authors discuss the need to have realistic expectations about the time it might take children, particularly older children, to adjust to the new family. Parents need to recognize that children in stepfamilies may have conflicting emotions — wanting the new family to work out but still having feelings of loyalty to the old family structure.

One way you and your husband can help the children work through such feelings is simply by spending time with them. Talk with them about the family left behind and what expectations they might have for the new family structure. Every child is different and will work through things in his or her own way — just be patient, and work on ways together to find solutions to challenges you come across and ideas for making the new family a good place for everyone.

Family Fundamentals is a monthly column on family issues. It is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to *Family Fundamentals*, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu.



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Dear Subscriber: This column was reviewed by Lois Clark and Nancy Recker, family and consumer sciences educators for Ohio State University Extension.

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