



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Administration for Children and Families  
Office of Family Assistance

## National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse (NRFC) Technical Assistance Webinar

Tuesday September 22, 2009

2:00 – 3:45 EDT

### Helping Fathers Address Stepfamily and Multiple Partner Fertility Issues

#### Moderator:

**Nigel Vann:** NRFC Director of Training & Technical Assistance

#### Presenters:

**Kay Pasley:** Professor and Chair, Department of Family and Child Sciences, Florida State University

**Billy Petty:** Contract Teacher, People of Principle, Midland, TX

**Guy Bowling:** Manager, FATHER Project, Goodwill Easter Seals, Minneapolis, MN





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# What the research tells us about stepfamilies and stepfathers

**Dr. Kay Pasley**  
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# Topics to be Covered

- What is a stepfamily?
- How prevalent are stepfamilies?
- What are common issues stepfamilies face?
- What is known about stepfathering specifically?
- What factors affect stepfathering?
- What does it mean for practice?



# What is a stepfamily?

**Couple (married or unmarried) in which one of the adults has a child or children from a prior union...**

- Unmarried mother/father, her/his child, and her/his partner/husband/wife (not the father/mother of the child)
- Divorced mother/father, her/his child, and her/his new partner/husband/wife
- Widowed mother/father, her/his child, and her/his new partner/husband/wife



# Prevalence of Stepfamilies

- **Estimates**

40-50% of first marriages end in divorce

75% will remarry (65% bring children from prior union)

60% redivorce

- ***Our best estimates =***

-- 70% of all children live with 2 parents; of those 10.5% reside in a stepfamily

-- 26% live with 1 parent; of those with a partner, 11% have a stepchild residing in the home (< 18 yrs.)



# Common Issue in Stepfamilies

- Merging family histories
- Issues of resource distribution
- Loyalty conflicts
- Competing developmental needs
- Interested third-parties



# What is Known About Stepfathering

- Ambiguity and difficulty of role
- Common stepparenting behaviors
  - Attempts to control/monitor met with negativity
  - Less monitoring, less warmth, fewer positive expressions (not more negative), less frequent communication
  - Disengagement common (linked to better SF-SC relationships, but more tension in M-C relationship)
  - More involvement overtime
- Sex of child and stepparent effects
- Mother-stepfather relationships effects



# Factors Affecting Stepfathering

- Perception of stepchildren and own children
- Frequency of “everyday talk” with SC
- Quality of mother-child relationship
- Quality of the mother-stepfather relationship
- Sex of stepchild
- Coparental relationship with bio-parent





# What does it mean for practice?

- Exploring personal biases
- Importance of normalizing
  - Need for time and patience
  - Setting realistic expectations
- Developing communication and problem-solving skills
- Other strategies that work:
  - Befriending
  - Setting limits through the mother-child connection
  - Effective undermining



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# A Stepfather's Story



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# A survey of Stepdads: The best way to bond with your stepchild is ...\*

Here are the results: (Total Votes: 74)

- Conversation 38 (51%)
- Working together 12 (16%)
- Board games 6 (8%)
- Playing sport 5 (7%)
- Watching TV/movies 4 (5%)
- Help with homework, fishing, and computer games each got 2 votes
- Watching sport got no votes.

\* From an online survey – for more information contact Ron Brewer at [rdbrewer@grandecom.net](mailto:rdbrewer@grandecom.net)



# Tips for Stepfathers\*

1. Build a friendship with your stepchild before attempting discipline. Be patient.
2. Work as a team with your new partner to establish new house rules and methods of discipline.
3. The National Stepfamily Resource Center points out that stepfamilies usually fare better when the biological parent remains the primary disciplinarian until children are ready for a more active stepparent. A helpful model is that the stepparent gives input into how things go, but the biological parent retains the final say until children are ready.
4. Take part in family meetings and be open for suggestions from the children on chores and special tasks that need to be done.
5. Talk to your spouse in private if you feel undermined or left out.
6. Respect each other's privacy. Knock on doors before entering. Be an example of respect and courtesy.

\* Information gathered by Ron Brewer from various online sources.



# Support from Mom\*

Here are a few ways in which Mom can help her new partner adjust to his stepfather role:

- Offer encouragement as he attempts to balance work and fatherhood.
- Be patient while he finds his comfortable place in the family.
- Help him feel that he is an integral part of the decision making for discipline and family guidelines.
- If he has his own biological children from a previous relationship, recognize that this brings additional challenges and work with him to develop a clear understanding of how you will all interact together.

\* Information gathered by Ron Brewer from various online sources.



# General Advice for Stepdads\*

- Avoid saying negative things about the children's biological father (this could lead to the kids seeing you as an enemy).
- Don't get involved in a competition for the children with the biological father.
- Recognize that building new relationships takes time – so approach things slowly and carefully.
- Don't argue with your wife in front of the children.
- At first, avoid too much physical affection with the children (like hugs and kisses); instead start with verbal affection (e.g. comments such as "you sure look nice today"). As a general rule of thumb, take your lead from the children.

\* Information gathered by Ron Brewer from various online sources.



# Some Common Complaints from Stepdads

1. Nobody appreciates or respects me for how much work I do for this family.
2. I feel lumped in with the kids as something she's taking care of. Where's the romance? When the kids are around, I feel like I have to compete with them for a little attention.
3. The tension when the kids are here is so thick you can cut it with a knife.
4. There's no [privacy](#) around here.
5. She relies on me to [discipline](#) the kids and then gets angry at me for being too harsh on them.
6. Her ex is never around anymore, and I'm expected to do the parenting without being the dad.
7. When the kids are here, I'm neglected; when the kids are away, I have to comfort her because she misses them so much. When do we just get to be a couple?
8. I'd like a [kid of my own](#), but she wants me to be satisfied with hers.
9. She interferes too much with my relationship with the kids; she wants to be in on everything. We need to solve our disagreements ourselves sometimes, and she's always stepping in the middle.



# Some Common Complaints from Moms

1. He's too harsh on my kids. They're not perfect—they're kids!
2. He wants me to himself and resents the time and energy I put into my kids.
3. He wants to take over. I did just fine when I was by myself.
4. When life is fun, he's in the middle, having fun too. When things get tough, he withdraws, leaving me with all the issues to deal with.
5. He's jealous when I negotiate with my Ex. I have to! He thinks we're out having sex. He doesn't understand how hard these meetings are.
6. He wants the kids to love him like their own father. He shouldn't push so hard.
7. I know he misses his own kids, but he takes it out on mine by not paying attention to them.
8. He wants us to have a kid of our own. I'm not sure I want to start all over again.
9. He's so competitive with my son, and I worry about him with my daughter. Not that I think he'd do anything sexual (he would never cross the line) but I sense this intense attraction/repulsion between them, and I'm not comfortable with it.
10. I feel like this is the United Nations and I'm the simultaneous translator.



# Always look for the humorous side of things ....

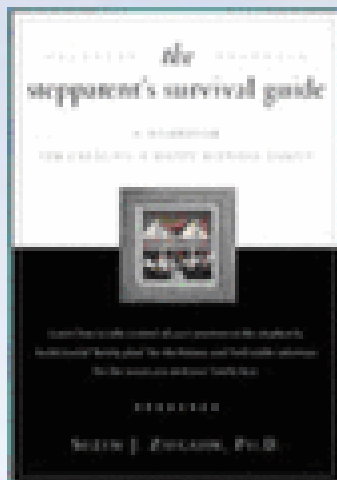
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"NOW THAT WE'VE GOT A NEW BULL, IS HE THE CALF'S STEPFATHER?"

The stepparents survival guide



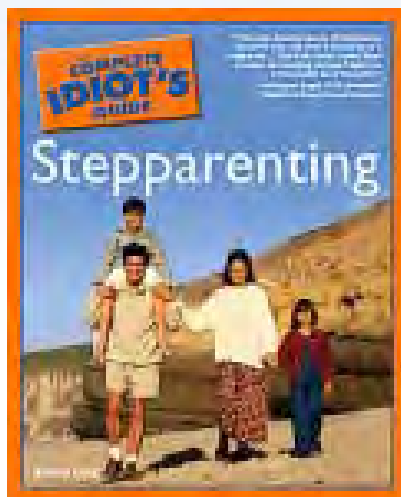
You're Not My Daddy (English)

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Keys to Successful  
Stepfathering

ISBN: 9780812097153





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# Promising Practices in working with stepdads and dads who father children with more than one mother

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# Objectives:

- Basic Understanding of the FATHER Project program
- Barriers to Working with Stepdads and Dads with Multiple Partners
- Common Issues Faced by Dads with Multiple Partners
- Effective Strategies in Working with Both Populations
- Understand New Co-Parenting Court Initiative



# What is the FATHER Project?

- Program of Goodwill/Easter Seals of MN
- FATHER Project Mission
- Demographics of Population Served
- Proven Collaborative Model



# FATHER Project Mission:

“Assisting fathers in overcoming barriers that prevent them from supporting their children economically and emotionally”



# FATHER Project: Description of Participants

- Average Age = 28.9 Years
- 45% lack High School Diploma
- 50% have criminal history
- Fragile Families: All are low-income, more than 90% are non-custodial parents
- African American (65%), Latino (14%), Caucasian (12%), Native American (8%)



# The FATHER Project

## What Services are Offered?

- Intensive Case Management
- Parenting and Support Groups
- Child Support Services
- Legal Services
- Employment Services
- GED Services/Education
- Mental Health Services
- Father and Family Activities
- Citizen Father Project / Community Action





# Barriers to working with step fathers and fathers with multiple partners

- General staff attitudes and beliefs about supporting fathers who have children with more than one mother
- Effective comprehensive service delivery systems
- Family demographics, such as age of children, income status and number of partners
- Father's characteristics such as educational background, previous fatherhood program experience, and probation/parole requirements
- Court ordered participation
- Father's perception of child support, legal rights, visitation/custody systems



# Common Issues Faced by Dads with Multiple Partners

- Relationship between mothers and fathers may be strained, resulting in little access to children
- Fathers feel as if their children do not need them, or they have nothing to contribute
- Incarceration histories and illegal drug use
  - Fathers have not developed relationships with their children before becoming incarcerated and do not know how to begin a relationship from prison
- Likely to have multiple child support orders
- Rates are increasing – more children growing up without both biological parents in the home
- Lower probability that mothers will marry them



# Effective Strategies in Working With both Populations

- Make program parent friendly
- Select culturally competent staff and provide them with ongoing training and supervision
- Establish and set clear goals to be achieved by program participants and monitor monthly
- Provide one-on-one intensive case management services
- Provide peer support parent education/support groups with specifically targeted curricula designed around core issues focusing on parenting and male responsibility
- Provide service referral component through collaborative partnerships preferably on-site .



# Co-parenting Court : A Problem Solving Court for Children and Families.

- Overview of the History and Background
- Goals and Outcomes
- Overview of Services
- Implementation and Evaluation



# THANK YOU !

For more information, contact:

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Visit us online: [www.fatherhood.gov](http://www.fatherhood.gov)

**If you have questions that were not addressed during this Webinar, please submit them to your Federal Project Officer.**

***Thank you and have a great afternoon!***