

The 4-1-1 on Step Parenting

Essential Tips on: Communicating & Bonding; Combining Families; and More!

Michele Sfakianos

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Smashwords Edition

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This book is not intended to serve as professional tax or legal advice (if you need specific advice, you should always consult a suitably qualified professional).

Clive Pyne Book Indexing

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my husband for being patient enough to take on the role of “step-dad” all those years ago!

Table of Contents

[Preface](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Chapter 1 CHILDREN FIRST](#)

[Chapter 2 AGE OLD MYTHS](#)

[Chapter 3 BEFORE THE “I DO’S”](#)

[Chapter 4 RELATIONSHIP BUILDING AND ROLES](#)

[Chapter 5 SUCCESSFUL STEP PARENTING AND COMMUNICATION](#)

[Chapter 6 FINANCIAL CONCERNS](#)

[Chapter 7 INTRODUCTIONS](#)

[Chapter 8 FAMILY RULES AND DISCIPLINE](#)

[Chapter 9 YOU NEED PRIVACY](#)

[Chapter 10 DO NOT GET STUCK IN COMPLAINT MODE](#)

[Chapter 11 BRINGING IN A NEW BABY](#)

[Chapter 12 WHEN STEP CHILDREN VISIT](#)

[Chapter 13 PROBLEM CHILDREN](#)

[Chapter 14 TEENAGERS: WHAT TO EXPECT](#)

[Chapter 15 ADULT STEP CHILDREN](#)

[Chapter 16 FINDING A HOME](#)

[Chapter 17 CROSS-CULTURAL STEP FAMILIES](#)

[Chapter 18 THE GRANDPARENTS](#)

[Chapter 19 THE EXTENDED FAMILY](#)

[Chapter 20 PLANNING HOLIDAYS](#)

[Chapter 21 GETTING HELP](#)

[Chapter 22 ALL ABOUT CUSTODY](#)

[Chapter 23 MEDICAL CONSENT](#)

[Chapter 24 SAME SEX MARRIAGES AND STEP PARENTING](#)

[Chapter 25 CHILD SUPPORT](#)

[Chapter 26 STEP PARENT ADOPTION](#)

[Conclusion:](#)

[Resources](#)

[Appendix A: Sample Medical Release Form](#)

[About the Author](#)

Detailed Table of Contents

Preface

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Chapter 1 CHILDREN FIRST

Coming Clean

Watch What You Risk

Chapter 2 AGE OLD MYTHS

Myths

Other myths

Chapter 3 BEFORE THE “I DO’S”

First Things First

To Have Success

Each Child is Different

Blended Family Differences

Chapter 4 RELATIONSHIP BUILDING AND ROLES

Step Parental Roles

Part-Time Step Parenting

Chapter 5 SUCCESSFUL STEP PARENTING AND COMMUNICATION

Learning to Communicate with Step Children

Giving Active Listening a Chance

Communicating with Step Children

Daily Communication

Communicate Your Expectations and Goals

Setting Values

Chapter 6 FINANCIAL CONCERNS

Having “THE” Discussion

Handling the History

Chapter 7 INTRODUCTIONS

Preparing to Meet the Children

Introducing Your New Friend to Your Children

Taking it Slow

Different Reactions

Prepping Your Kids to Meet Your Partner's Kids

Introducing the Kids to Others

Do Not Leap to Conclusions

Winning Over Your Partner's Child

Jealousy

Chapter 8 FAMILY RULES AND DISCIPLINE

First Things First

Two Houses, Two Sets of Rules

Chapter 9 YOU NEED PRIVACY

Keeping the Spark

Surprise Custody

Chapter 10 DO NOT GET STUCK IN COMPLAINT MODE

Top Biological Parent Complaints

Top Step Parent Complaints

Chapter 11 BRINGING IN A NEW BABY

How to Tell the Children

How to Tell the Ex-Partner

How to Tell the Grandparents

During the Pregnancy

After Baby Arrives

Teenager Reactions

Different Surnames

Parenting is Not Like Step Parenting

Chapter 12 WHEN STEP CHILDREN VISIT

The First Time

Regular Visits

Step Parent Visit Overload

The Abandoned Step Parent

Occasional Visits

Do Not Try to Change Them

The Child is not a Messenger

Do Not Try to Buy Them

Semi-Combined Visits

Beginnings and Endings

Visitation Schedules

Reassuring Your Own Kids

When a Child Refuses to Visit

Post-Visit

Chapter 13 PROBLEM CHILDREN

School Problems

Peer Relationships

Problems at Home

First Step is to Recognize

Self-Abuse, Eating Disorders, and Addiction

Chapter 14 TEENAGERS: WHAT TO EXPECT

Dealing with Your Adolescent Step Child

Discipline and the Step-teen

Temptations

Step-teen Advantages

The Hormone Years

The Humiliation Factor

Moving In with the Other Biological Parent

Chapter 15 ADULT STEP CHILDREN

Bonding

Solo Outings

Small Steps

Chapter 16 FINDING A HOME

When Not to Move

Moving in with Your Partner

Claiming Your Space

Defeating Ghosts

When Your Partner Moves in with You

Coming to Terms on Furniture

Post-Move Syndrome

Establishing Your Own Family Style

Chapter 17 CROSS-CULTURAL STEP FAMILIES

Understanding the Culture

Differences in Cultures

You are My Family

How to Communicate

Non-Verbal Communication Skills

Adjusting to Differences

Food and Dietary Restrictions

Religious Differences

Socioeconomic Differences

No Matter What

Chapter 18 THE GRANDPARENTS

Measuring Up

Morality and Judgment

Biological and Non-Biological Grandchildren

Step Children Ignoring Step Grandparents

Other Grandparents and You

Conflicts Between All the Grandparents

Separation is a Last Resort

The Rights of Grandparents

Wills

The Grandparent during the Divorce

The Grandparent as a Step Parent

The Step as Grandparent

Chapter 19 THE EXTENDED FAMILY

More People, More Time, More Decisions

The Value of the Extended Family

Be the Better Person

Honoring Original Relationships

The Other Relatives

Setting Realistic Goals

Guilt can be Destructive

Intrusive Ex-Partners

Death of an Ex-Partner

Badmouthing — Bad Idea

There is NO Competition

Chapter 20 PLANNING HOLIDAYS

Planning

Adult Step children and the Holiday Season

Guilt and Loyalty

Special Days to You

Gift Giving

Coordinating Gifts with Others

The Destructive Power of Expectations

Memories

Weddings, Graduations, and Other Special Events

Chapter 21 GETTING HELP

Finding the Right Person

What the Initials Mean

Step Family Support Groups and Organizations

Chapter 22 ALL ABOUT CUSTODY

What is Custody?

Deciding on Custody/Parenting

Is Custody Renegotiable

Visitation a.k.a. Spending Time

Chapter 23 MEDICAL CONSENT

Getting Permission

Chapter 24 SAME SEX MARRIAGES AND STEP PARENTING

Are you “In or Out” of the closet?

Coming Out is a Process

First Reactions

Being Co-Parent

What’s Your Role?

Chapter 25 CHILD SUPPORT

Child Support

How Much Child Support?

Deadbeats

Pay on Time

Child Support, a Taxing Issue

Chapter 26 STEP PARENT ADOPTION

Why Adopt your Step Child?

When Not to Adopt

Legal Guardianship

Using Lawyers

Getting Consent

Terminating Parental Rights

Filing the Petition

Change Names?

Are You Fit?

The Home Study

The Waiting Period

The Adoption Hearing

Conclusion:

DO

DO NOT

Resources

Appendix A: Sample Medical Release Form

About the Author

Preface

We all know the story of Cinderella. Fortunately there was a happy ending, but it did bring to light the “wicked step-mother.” Most everything you read about step parenting has to do with evil stepmothers, obnoxious children, responsibility with no control, resentful ex-partners and lack of worth or appreciation. But do not be discouraged because there is a better side to step families. Step families, when working together, can work even better than several “real” families.

In 2010, fifty percent of marriages ended in divorce and according to statistics, at least sixty-five percent would remarry. In my teens my parents divorced. When my father decided to remarry, it wasn't an easy adjustment. Seeing my father with someone else was difficult, but she helped to make the transition easier by not forcing a relationship. Fortunately, I had a positive experience with my stepmother over the years. Some people are not so lucky. Later, my mother remarried and again I was fortunate enough to get a great step-father. Both of my children have step parents. Although divorce is hard on everyone, having a new step parent does not have to be.

Step parenting can be stressful and may be a difficult role to fulfill. Step families, also referred to as blended families, are more of the norm now more than ever. When families “blend” to create step families, things rarely progress smoothly. A few children may resist the changes occurring, while parents may become frustrated or disappointed when the new family does not appear to function like their previous family.

Most changes to a family structure require adjustment time for everyone involved. With the right guidance and realistic expectations, most blended families are able to work out their growing pains and live together successfully. To create a healthy blended family, you need open communication, positive attitudes, mutual respect, and plenty of love and patience.

As my children have aged, I have noticed a more relaxed relationship with their step parent(s). This is why I was encouraged to write this book. I wanted to share the trials and tribulations of my family and show you the outcome can be a great one. Life is what you make it, so make it great!

Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone who supported the beginning series of “The 4-1-1 on Life Skills.” Without their thirst for information and their faith in me, I would not have been challenged to begin this series. I know the hours of internet research and fact checking will prove to be worth the time so I might enlighten the lives of others.

Thank you also to my family for their love and support through this crazy process. My family has been a vital part and inspiration for writing the series. Providing the information to everyone, through our experiences, has been rewarding.

Thank you to my friend Ed who helped with the initial proof-reading and to my daughter Jenna for helping with the special section reviews.

Most of all, thank you to my husband for being the best stepfather he could be all of these years.

Introduction

Man and woman relationships alone are difficult. When you add his kids, her kids, his ex, her ex and the in-laws, most people cannot handle the pressure. Step-families require more effort and understanding because of more people involved, and this often includes young ones who didn't ask to be put into the situation to begin with.

Long ago, the term "stepmother" and "stepfather" were used to describe the "new" parent who stepped in after the "real" parent's death. Today the step parent is less often a substitute than he is an added parent.

Being a parent triggers memories and emotions from one's own childhood, whether conscious or unconscious. This may or may not bring fear to those thinking about raising another person's child. Parents may raise children similar to their own upbringing, or the opposite. Parents may strive to give their children an entirely different upbringing.

Parenting can be one of the most rewarding things we do in our lives. It can also be one of the most difficult undertakings and parental responsibility is not a responsibility we can take lightly. Taking on the role of step parent can perhaps be the most difficult undertaking of all.

Most people find it difficult to talk about step parenting in general because there are situations in which you can find yourself in the role of a step parent. Finding yourself as a step dad or step mom to a child under three is easier than coming into an established family with several children ranging in age from four to sixteen or seventeen year olds and beyond. In the first case you can be presented with a few additional problems outside the normal realm of child parenting, while in the second case you could be facing a number of difficulties.

Step parents find raising step children can bring with it not only difficulties with the child or children involved, but also potential conflict with your partner, their ex-partner, and indeed an internal struggle with yourself. Where differences may arise between you and a step child you will inevitably be confronted with "why should I listen to you, you are not my father," or something similar.

When conflict arises with your partner over a parenting decision you might find yourself being demoted to the position of a "second-class" parent and find yourself caught between your partner and the child or with both siding against you.

The manner in which you approach the role of parent or step parent and the attitude you put forth will differ from those around you. You must pay particular attention to your actions so as to not alienate yourself from your partner or the children. Things to take into consideration when blending a family are: finances, living arrangements, holidays, grandparent responsibilities, and legal ramifications. These are just a sample of the items we will cover. Not everyone is willing to take on this responsibility, but you have made the decision to do so. I hope you will learn from the information contained herein to make the transition easy for everyone involved.

This may sound difficult and you may already want to give up. Do not give up! I can

assure you things will be great!

Children First

Coming Clean

When you find a person you care about, the one whom you would like to have a future with, you are going to want to bring your children into the picture. Of course, you want your significant other to already know you have children otherwise you may find a situation on your hands. Not every person is capable of accepting children belonging to another. A number of people are frightened of the responsibilities children represent. There are women who are afraid of being called the wicked stepmother and all it entails.

As soon as you are officially dating or can find an appropriate moment to mention it, you should get it out into the open. You do not want to get involved with a man or woman who has negative feelings about children. Most will have a reaction which may seem a bit odd, but it is not the same as having them say “I hate ankle biters” or call them “rug rats” and would never have them in their home.

Your children are going to figure out you have a relationship going with someone—long before you are ready to bring everyone together for their initial “check-each-other-out” session. Older children will have the most difficulty welcoming a new person into their family. Children often prefer to have you all to themselves because of the memories of the life you had with their other parent. Even though the children know the relationship is over, it is still difficult to see you with another person.

Watch What You Risk

The risk you run with younger children is forming an immediate attachment. This is why you want to be sure your relationship has potential before you allow your younger children to bond. Even though you cannot always predict the outcome of a relationship, it is easier on a child not to have to experience unnecessary losses. Children may already feel a “loss” of one parent even though the parent is still in their life.

You also want to avoid including this new person in too many of your family days at first. You are beginning to develop a relationship which needs a baseline of a strong bond between you and your new partner. If your time is spent focused on becoming a family unit you are not going to be able to keep things in balance. You may be forced to skip a few important stages of your relationship on the course toward greater involvement and commitment. You are also trying to build a whole new family configuration as a single person with your kids. Your children, too, deserve your attention and your time while working through the change in their lives caused by divorce, separation or death.

You do not need to rush anything. You need to allow everyone to get used to each other and for you to decide whether you want to create a new family. If you have reservations you should listen to your intuition and wait until either the feelings are resolved or you understand clearly the relationship is not right for you. This is your chance at a new and happy life. If important aspects are missing, wait for another situation to come along. Do not settle because you are lonely or think you will never have the right opportunity. Do

not try and force feelings not there yet.

Whether you are male or female pay special attention to your children's reactions to your new love. Children often have their own way of sizing up a relationship, and may see something you do not but in fact, should. If you are sure you have met the right person, give your children time to get to know him on their own terms. Give them space and do not insist on doing anything uncomfortable for them, such as hugging or giving goodbye or goodnight kisses, until ready.

If the kids are expressing distress, depression, resistance or rebellion, listen! Children need to have their feelings acknowledged. If kids see you are listening to their feelings, they feel able to listen to yours.

Remember to constantly reassure your children you still love them and no new relationship will change this love. Tell them you want to form a family and ask for their input. The more a part of things the less frightened children will feel. You may be surprised. If you have found the right person for you, your children may be as happy about things as you are.