



## Stepfamilies: Help Children Thrive

### Schedule consistent, regular parent-child one-to-one time:

- One way to help children's sense of loss is schedule consistent, regular parent-child time. Successful stepfamilies carve out both adult step couple alone and regular, reliable one-to-one parent-child alone time.
- Multi-tasking time doesn't count! Label parent-child time clearly: "This is our time. Just us." If you need to change it, be sure to reschedule. Keep this time off-limits for nagging, criticism, and homework. Never withdraw parent-child time as punishment.
- Sometimes, just increasing reliable parent-child time can substantially improve a "resistant" or depressed child's behavior.

### Stepparents begin with connection, not correction.

- Parents enforce rules; stepparents concentrate on building relationships with kids
- Once a trusting relationship is established, stepparents may sometimes slowly move into "authoritative" parenting, especially with children under nine. ("Slowly" = couple of years, not a couple of months)
- Good model to start: stepparent has input; the parent has final say.
- When the parent is out or away, he or she places the stepparent in charge. "John is in charge tonight. I expect a good report." Stepparent enforces

parent's rules. "Your mom's rule is no TV before homework." If problems, stepparent reports to the parent, who handles misbehaviors.



### Develop "house rules"

- Since discipline remains a stressful topic in most stepfamilies, useful if a couple can agree on rules for all children.
- Stability derived from clear and reasonable "house rules" allow the stepparent and stepchild to exist in an environment of greater comfort.
- Not only do stepparent and child have a sense of order, but stepparent and spouse do not become triangulated by the child's behavior

### Practice authoritative (nurturing and moderately firm) parenting

- Substantial research establishes that authoritative parenting is best for children on every measure imaginable
- Authoritative parenting is a more powerful predictor of children's wellbeing than whether a child lives in a never-divorced family, a single-parent family, or a stepfamily.

