

The SEVEN Fatal Mistake Stepdads Make

Stacey James Wheeler

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Though no two blended families are exactly alike, some common problems are consistently the biggest source of turmoil. Identifying those sources and defusing them will help create a more peaceful home and a successful marriage. One of the easiest ways to strengthen a marriage -even before it begins- is to identify the issues that cause turmoil and avoid them. With that in mind, I offer this list of the seven most common problems Stepdads face. I've made this list available to help current and future Stepdads avoid becoming part of the nearly 70% of Stepdad couples that end in divorce.

The Seven Fatal Mistake Most Stepdads Make

1) Not Agreeing to the Rules Before You Say "I Do"

As few as one in four Stepdads will have a successful marriage. These men are more likely to ask for a divorce than husbands in any other category. One of the key reasons is the stress created by lack of control in your home. More than a third of Stepdads report their parenting role isn't defined. More than 40% say that out of control kids were a key reason they left their wives. Knowing the right conversations to have makes a huge difference. Agreeing on standards and rules will help relieve a great deal of stress and improve your odds of a successful marriage. Forging a working agreement is hard. Most couples don't make the effort or don't know how to even start. Because of this most couples continually struggle with the issue throughout their marriage.



2) Becoming the Disciplinarian

Unless you live in an unusually perfect world, you and your wife will have different approaches to parenting and running a household. There will be changes you'll want to make. Some of them will have to do with the rules, expectations and behavior of the kids. Can you imagine living in a house where the kids behave in a way you think is ill-mannered or even rude? Now imagine that you have no say in how the way those kids are disciplined and no say in what behavior is okay.

As I mentioned, if you fail to establish standards you can both agree on there will be problems further down the road. How do you fix the issue of the children's behavior? It's vital that the Stepdad should avoid becoming the disciplinarian. When a Stepdad takes on the role of punisher-in-chief it has an immediate negative effect on family bonding.



Knowing how to avoid this situation, while still maintaining rules and standards will increase the peace in the home, create better family unity and reduce fights with your spouse.

3) Not Working With the Biological Father

I've spoken with many men who report their wife's (or soon-to-be wife's) ex is a jerk. I've even had some tell me the man is a criminal, an addict, or even incarcerated. Before you toss a brick through her ex's window remember this vital fact: He has more legal rights as a parent than you! If he decides he doesn't like you he can make your life very hard. Make her ex an ally, instead of an enemy.



Nearly a third of divorced or separated Stepdads said problems with the biological father were a factor in the breakup. The bio-dad can be a Stepdad's greatest ally or worst enemy. How it turns out may be up to you. How you carry yourself could be the reason he chooses one option over the other. Many bio-dads feel threatened by the relationship and time Stepdads have with their kids. Issues like competition, jealousy and even territorial attitudes are often the

root of the issue. When you marry a single mom you marry her entire situation. If the bio-dad's in the picture he'll be an extended part of your family as long as the kids are part of your life. Knowing how to build a working relationship with the bio-dad will lower your household stress, improve your ability to bond with the kids and reduce your odds of divorce.



4) Trying to be Dad

Bonding as a family is a vital (and often overlooked) key to success in Stepdad marriages. When a family feels like a team it works like a team. Some couples mistakenly believe that forcing the kids to call their new Stepdad “dad” will make the group feel more like a family. It usually backfires.

Most children won’t bond with their new Stepdad as easily if they are forced to call him dad. Insisting on this title will usually also alienate the bio-dad if he’s still in the picture. As I mentioned, having the bio-dad on your side is pretty important.

Many men who marry single moms believe that to be a good stepdad, they need to be seen as (or even be called) dad by their new kids. Unless the children are very young (generally three or younger), then they may never make that transition. The older they are, the less likely it becomes. Understanding how to position yourself as a “parent” is the key to success. This strategy will help you lay the groundwork for a positive parent-child relationship.

5) Letting Your Step Kids Think They Aren’t Important to You

Nearly four out of five men who become Stepdads have never had kids of their own. They have little-to-no experience parenting. Because of this most Stepdads don’t understand how to make a connection with their new kids. The result is the kids in their lives often feel their Stepdad doesn’t care about them. This makes bonding difficult and can make your step children feel alienated.

When children feel unimportant they will act out in a variety of ways. It’s a passive-aggressive cry for help. In cases where they don’t act out, a rift emerges and they will begin to avoid their Stepdad.



When kids are emotional it lays the groundwork for divided parenting: Where your children will only go to their mother when they want something. On the surface this might seem like a convenient arrangement to some Stepdads. The kids aren't coming to them for things. Their mom's handling it. But there's a bigger problem growing just beneath the surface.

Mothers tend to be more permissive and are likely to say yes more than no. As time goes on, this set the stage for parenting disagreements. If the Stepdad disagrees with his wife about what's acceptable he risks becoming the bad guy in his kids' eyes. This common scenario creates discontent in the family. Because of the tension and potential turmoil, it's likely to increase the odds of a break up. It's vital to understand this common issue and know how to build rapport with the kids. Building a working relationship with your wife will help you create a connection with your new kids.

6) Neglecting to Bond as a Family

There's no issue more important in a Stepdad marriage than family bonding. When you feel like a team you act like a team. When you feel like you're on different teams you act like opponents. Unfortunately, family bonding a term many people either don't completely understand, or are intimidated by. So let's stop for a moment and define family bonding.

“Creating significant shared memories and experiences, which make the family more connected as a group.”

So Why Does It Matter?

There are specific, valuable benefits to bonding as a family:

1. Learning to Listen and Work Well Together
2. Improved Family Communication
3. Building Trust
4. Strengthening Mutual Respect and Affection
5. Learning to Value One Another More
6. Improving Bonds and Relationships
7. Better Behaved Children



Bonding is especially important in families with children who've suffered a loss (such as divorce or death of a parent). Without thinking, children often take a defensive position with their emotions after a loss. It's natural reaction to emotional trauma.

Kids may be less likely to bond with another parent figure and draw unusually closer to the parent they have remaining. This challenging situation can usually be overcome through bonding experiences. Bonding takes years. Some experts say three or more. Many Stepdads neglect to put the effort into this important task.

The benefits of bonding flow in two-directions. The Stepdad benefits as much as the child from bonding. But it doesn't have to be difficult. In fact, it should be fun. There are simple, enjoyable ways you can bond as a family. Knowing how to do it will make your family life better and your marriage stronger.

7) Becoming Overwhelmed

More than 90% of men who replied to the two year Stepdad Survey reported they either don't have kids of their own or don't have primary custody of their kids when they become Stepdads. 78% of these men had no kids of their own. What this means:

1. The vast majority of men who become Stepdads have no experience raising kids
2. The vast majority of new Stepdads are the only newcomers when they join a family already in progress



So why is this information important?

Though the number of kids and ages vary, the research shows when the average man becomes a Stepdad they are likely to join a family that looks like this:

- More than two-thirds of them marry a woman with two or fewer kids
- Over 76% of these married a woman with kids between the age of 2 and 12 years old
- Nearly 40% said they occasionally, rarely or never took an active role in parenting the kids
- A quarter of those whose marriage failed said feeling overwhelmed contributed to the divorce

These facts explain why so many new Stepdads struggle. Most have no previous experience with parenting and join a family with established rules and expectations. As the only new addition to the family –in most cases- they have to either accept the



existing rules or find a way to change the rules without alienating the kids and wife. This takes a great deal of communication skill. Unfortunately, (according to a 2013 study) lack of communication skills is the #1 reason most couples break up.

Add to this that kids age ten and older are more resistant to change. About a third of Stepdad marriages have kids in the ten and older age range. These age groups are hard to bond with, which makes it hard to create a feeling of a unified family group.

The kids' ages, along with the lack of parenting experience and the lack of communication about the Stepdad's parenting role leave Stepdads struggling for ways to make it work. Because of this nearly twice as many Stepdads ask for a divorce, compared to traditional marriages.

The good news is there are ways to reduce the stress levels and avoid becoming overwhelmed. Knowing how to reduce the stress will help you increase your odds of marriage success.

You Are a Parent

You woke up once day and discovered you were a parent. If you're like 81% of Stepdads you've never had kids and now you're expected to know how to be a father figure. Take a few deep breaths. You're new at this. You're struggling to make it work. That's okay! We're rarely great at anything without practice so when we talk I'm going to provide some tools to help you start becoming the best parent you can be. Until we talk here's your homework assignment: Go to Stepdadding.com and scroll through the [Ask The Stepdad articles](#) . Check out all the different challenges Stepdads face. It's important that you understand you're not alone. Every Stepdad struggles but I can help you can overcome those struggles.