

## About Stepfamilies

About 75 percent of divorced persons eventually remarry. Since 65 percent of remarriages involve children from a prior marriage, one of three Californians is a stepparent, stepchild, or stepsibling.

**Myths about stepfamilies abound. A common one is that love is instant between stepchildren and stepparents. Another is that adjustment to stepfamily life happens quickly. While people are hopeful and optimistic when they remarry, it takes some time to get to know each other and build positive relationships.**

**Stepfamilies differ from nuclear families in that the dynamics are more difficult. Stepchildren who don't live full-time with the stepfamily will take longer to move through the process; for example, if they only visit twice a month because they have less one-on-one time. And yet, research shows that five and ten years later, most children do recover their emotional equilibrium.**

**Stepfamilies that learn how to navigate the process of becoming a cohesive, loving family are destined for success.**

Most health insurance policies cover the service of MFTs so long as the services are "medically necessary." This typically includes coverage for face-to-face sessions for a diagnosable mental health problem. Such coverage may be limited. Please contact your health insurance company for detailed information about the coverage available to you and your family.



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## YOURS, MINE, AND OURS:

Creating Successful Stepfamilies



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California Association of  
Marriage and Family Therapists



## OFFERING EXTRA SUPPORT About Marriage and Family Therapists

Marriage and Family Therapists (MFTs) are relationship experts. They work with individuals, couples, families, children, adolescents, and the elderly, providing support and perspective as patients struggle with life's challenges.

Licensed by the State of California, MFTs are psychotherapists who are uniquely trained and credentialed to assess, diagnose, and treat a wide range of issues so individuals achieve more adequate, satisfying and productive relationships and social adjustment.

The California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists (CAMFT) is an independent statewide non-profit organization made up of over 29,000 mental health professionals. CAMFT is dedicated to advancing marriage and family therapy as a healing art, science, and mental health profession. In fact, CAMFT sponsors TherapistFinder.com™ so Californians can gain access to qualified local experts who can help.



Seeking a Marriage and Family Therapist or other mental health professional to assist with life's difficulties is a sign of courage and a step in the right direction. Always ask about a therapist's special areas of expertise (e.g. grief counseling, children's issues, relationship counseling) before you engage in therapy to ensure it's the right fit for you.

TherapistFinder™ is a California-wide interactive, online directory that is user-friendly and searchable by name, location, and area of expertise. It's your introduction to one or more qualified psychotherapists who hold a California license.



### “BLENDED” OR IN A BLENDER?

While some people like to use the term “blended families,” stepfamilies often say they feel like they're in a blender. Stepfamilies come together because of a loss. The new parent may be grieving the freedom of life as a single person while the person remarrying and his or her children still grieve the loss of their original family. Family life can feel chaotic in the beginning as everyone adjusts to new roles.

### THE SEVEN STAGES OF CREATING A SUCCESSFUL STEP FAMILY

Which stage are you in? The average stepfamily takes four to seven years to go through the complete cycle. The right therapist can speed up the process.

- **Fantasy**—Feeling “Isn't this going to be fun?” “I'll have these great kids!”
- **Immersion**—The fantasy fades as issues emerge. Couples and families often enter therapy during this stage.
- **Awareness**—Family members can verbalize what's not working. They gain clarity as they can name feelings.
- **Mobilization**—Adults work together as a parenting team and commit to working it out.
- **Action**—The family knows it will make it!
- **Contact**—Stepparents feel authentic and loving towards their step kids.
- **Resolution**—The family feels whole and rewarding. The stepparent feels that the stepkids are his or her kids.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO RIGHT NOW

- **Have realistic expectations.** All members of a stepfamily need to get to know each other well before a marriage takes place. Give up both the myth of instant love and the myth that there will be never-ending, unsolvable problems. Neither is true.
- **Strengthen the couple relationship.** Struggles in which the biological parent feels “in the middle” can undermine the family's development. Couples need to communicate positively, spend alone time, and be honest and open.
- **Recognize that children are members of two households.** Many stepchildren wonder where they fit in or where they belong. Children can adjust if both families communicate about rules, consequences, and establish a parenting partnership.
- **Develop new roles.** Stepmothering can be especially difficult because of high expectations by both men and women on what a mother should do. In the beginning, stepparents should befriend the stepchildren while biological parents do the discipline.
- **Find the right therapist.** Look for therapists with training and experience working with stepfamilies as well as someone who is warm, supportive, and goal-oriented. Use short telephone interviews to shop for a good fit with potential therapists. Ask about availability, fees, and if they accept your health insurance.