



# ***Understanding & Ministering to Stepfamilies***

Presented by:

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**[www.SuccessfulStepfamilies.com](http://www.SuccessfulStepfamilies.com)**

## BUILDING SMART STEPFAMILIES

1. The Church, Family Life Ministry, & the Case for Stepfamily Ministry

2. Musical Homes –

- Current Estimates: **26-30% of married-couple households** contain a stepchild (under 18; doesn't count the other household).
- **At some point... 50% of children** will have a stepparent; **40% of women** will live in a stepfamily home (married or cohabiting).
- **1 out of 3** Americans has a steprelationship; 1 of 2 eventually will have.
- Approximately **30%** of all weddings in the US today form stepcouple marriages.
- **60-70 %** will likely end in divorce (almost half before the fifth year)  
(statistics and references available at <http://www.successfulstepfamilies.com/view/24>).

3. Despite the prevalence of stepfamilies in the US, stepfamily ministries are still rare.

### **BARRIERS TO STEPFAMILY MINISTRY**

1. We don't \_\_\_\_\_ the need.

2. Stepfamilies frequently are *spiritually*\_\_\_\_\_.

3. We don't \_\_\_\_\_ to perceive the need.

4. \_\_\_\_\_ struggles with the marriage & divorce issue.

Divorce is not the unforgivable sin!

- We have a message of redemption that stepfamilies need to hear.  
It is time for the church to articulate that message of redemption.

5. Few \_\_\_\_\_, authors, or Christian family experts who have experienced stepfamily life.

### **Stepfamily Ministry –**

- ...is **not** about condoning a past or lowering God's standard for marriage;
- ...is about preventing divorce in this generation and the next;
- ...is about strengthening homes so children can grow in faith.

### **UNDERSTANDING STEPFAMILIES**

- Contortions to life...
- Many shapes and sizes...

### **SUMMARY: STEPFAMILY UNIQUE CHALLENGES**

1. Ambiguity of Identity

2. Typical Problems of a Complex System

- No clear definitions of who's in and who's out.
- Marriage is a package deal.

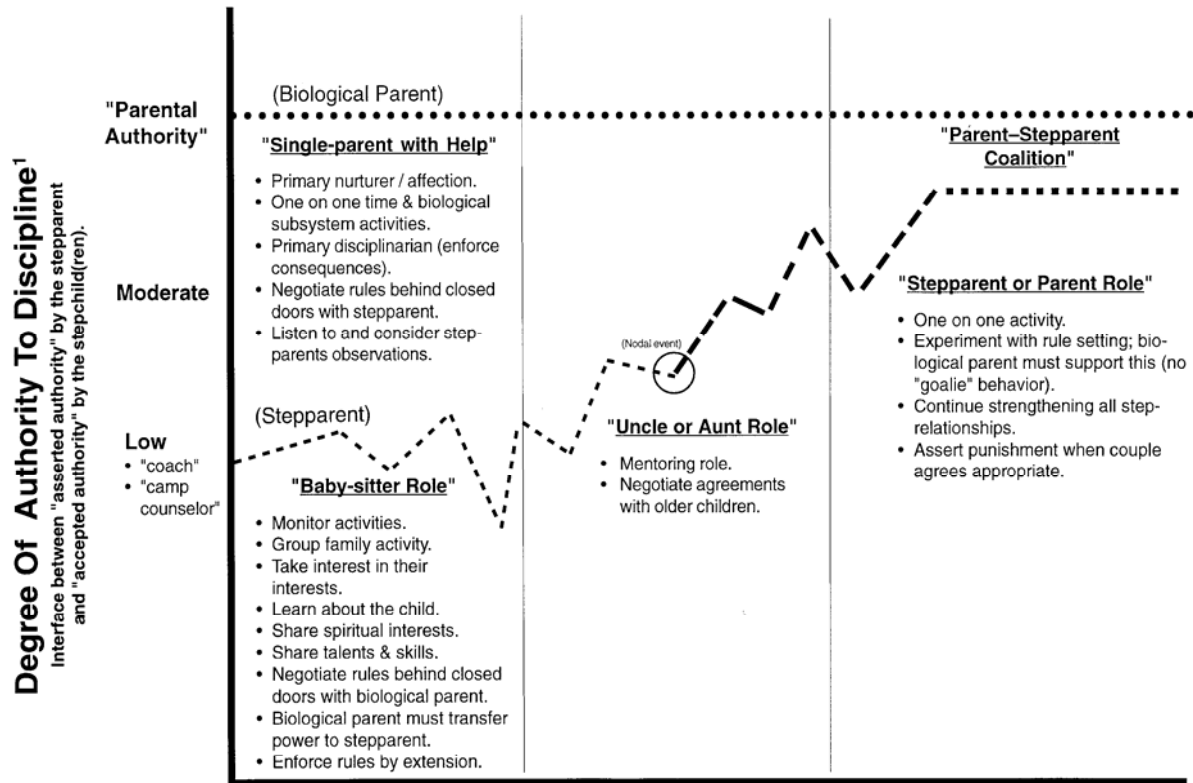
- Parenting is a multi-adult, multi-household dynamic.
- Family spirituality and belief system is unclear.
- Stepfamilies have more potential under-miners than any other family.

## **REMARRIAGE & STEPFAMILY EDUCATION: CHALLENGING OUR ASSUMPTIONS OF FAMILY LIFE**

*Key Premise:* We cannot do remarriage & stepfamily education the same way we do first-marriage education/counseling.

1. "As goes the marriage..."
2. "Putting the marriage first provides stability for children."
3. Assumption of parental good will.
4. Household power and autonomy.
5. Born from asset.
6. Family members share a basic commitment to family stability.
7. Stepparents should be "authoritative" in their parenting style.

# A Prescription for Evolving Parent & Stepparent Roles



Length of time required to increase parental authority will vary according to age of child, previous family experiences, relationship with noncustodial parents, child's temperament/personality, parenting style variations, and child's overall stepfamily satisfaction level.

Time With Stepchildren



## 4 Pillars of Stepparent Success

- Level 4**

**Evolve Your Role Appropriately:**

  1. "Babysitter"
  2. "Uncle/Aunt"
  3. Stepparent or Parent Role
- Level 3**

**Wise Stepparents:**

  1. Let the child set the pace for affection & authority
  2. Focus initially on building relationship & earn respect

**Wise Bio Parents:**

  1. Don't become easily defensive
  2. Consider the "outsider" SP's perspective
- Level 2**

**Stand Together as a Team:**

  1. Talk, negotiate, support shared decisions
  2. Bio parent takes primary role with children
  3. SP takes secondary role with children
  4. Strive to be "alternating advocates"
- Level 1**

**Three Foundations for Bio Parents:**

  1. Declare your loyalty to your spouse
  2. Pass power to the SP & back them up
  3. Trust the stepparent's heart

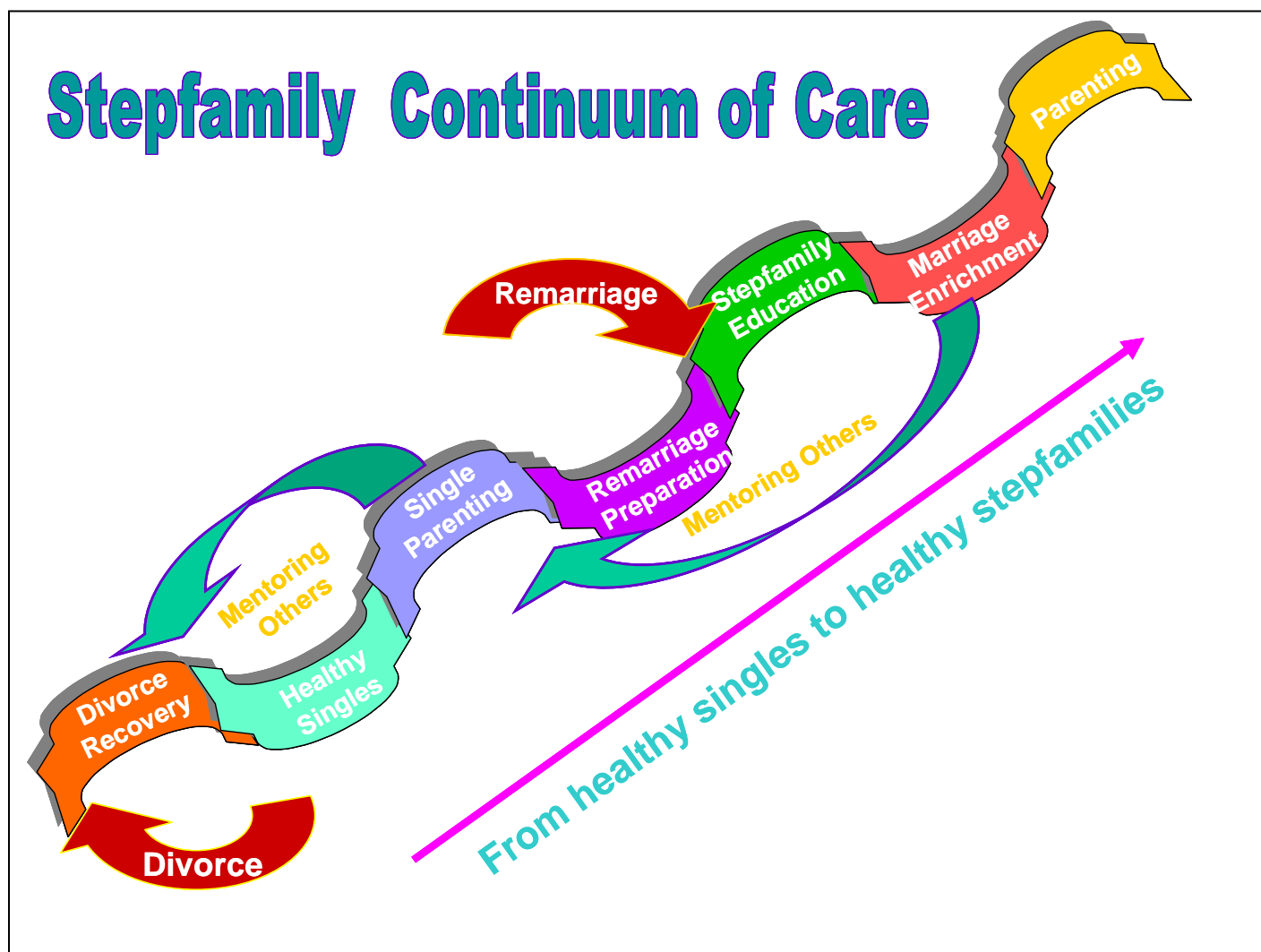
## STEPFAMILY MINISTRY

Three Key Objectives:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Strategies:

1. Raise the awareness of your leadership and church.
2. Create a Continuum of Care (Jeff & Judi Parziale, InStep Ministries)



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3. Not only give “stepfamily answers” (not “original family” answers), but help SF’s ask better questions.
4. Systemic Education—not just interventions focused on subsystems.
5. Create Connection: Educational Groups or Special Bible Classes
  - Choose a format that matches your church infrastructure.
  - Keep a “Crock-pot Ministry Mentality”
6. Discuss stepparenting & remarriage pressures when doing general marriage & family enrichment
  - Make use of side-bars.
7. Marriage Mentoring

## **PRACTICAL MINISTRY SUGGESTIONS**

1. Keep an outreach mentality
2. Use the online Couple Checkup (individuals and groups)
  - [www.SuccessfulStepfamilies.com/go/CoupleCheckup](http://www.SuccessfulStepfamilies.com/go/CoupleCheckup)
3. Sensitize your Bible class teachers to stepfamily complexities

#### 4. Youth Ministries

5. Host a stepfamily seminar, sponsor a stepfamily retreat, or offer a short-course for stepfamily adults – but do something!

#### 6. Pastoral Counseling

#### 7. Pre-Stepfamily Counseling

([www.SuccessfulStepfamilies.com/go/premaritalcounseling](http://www.SuccessfulStepfamilies.com/go/premaritalcounseling))

- Foster deliberation & help anticipate “Common Relational Changes in Stepfamilies **After** the Wedding”
- Identify and label unrealistic expectations.
- Normalize the stepfamily journey.
- Utilize the Couple Checkup.
- Work with the children, too! (e.g., names, introductions; changes in rules; how the other home will react; fears; loyalties; etc.)
- Encourage a Family Medallion as a ritual of connection and affirmation in the wedding ceremony ([www.familymedallion.com](http://www.familymedallion.com)).



## Common Relational Changes in Stepfamilies After the Wedding<sup>1</sup>

Ron L. Deal, LMFT, LPC

Person(s)	Spiritual, Psychological, Legal, & Practical Shifts That Occur After Remarriage
<b>Stepparents</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increase in spiritual and parental responsibility for stepchildren. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before marriage: “hands-off”, cordial, get-to-know the kids posture.</li> <li>• After marriage: judging of child and parenting style of spouse; attempt to fill the gaps by taking on agendas for the child; assume spiritual roles (e.g. “head” of the home); assumes they will be given equal say in family decisions.</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Assumes spouse will “put them first” before the children.</li> </ol>
<b>Biological Parents</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Senses stepparent’s increased agenda for the children and is irritated/resists their judgement or increased activity.</li> <li>2. May hand off too much responsibility to the stepparent.</li> <li>3. May alter attitudes toward an ex-spouse’s access to children since “we’re a whole family now.”</li> </ol>
<b>Stepchildren</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Fear loss of biological parent. May result in an oppositional/resentful attitude toward the stepparent.</li> <li>2. Perceive stepparent as exerting authority and may resent their attempts for power or to join the family.</li> <li>3. Now feel that enjoying time with the stepparent is betraying the non-custodial biological parent.</li> </ol>
<b>Ex-Spouse</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. May grow increasingly fearful of losing children to stepparent and/or more depressed about their own life circumstances.</li> <li>2. May become more negative toward the stepparent and/or ex-spouse; may increase the loyalty pulls on the children which, when carried to the other home, may result in conflict.</li> </ol>

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Scott Browning, “Why Didn’t Our Two Years of Dating Make the Remarriage Easier?” in *Stepfamilies*, Summer, 2000, p. 6

## Stepfamily Developmental Tasks Chart

([www.SuccessfulStepfamilies.com/developmentaltasks](http://www.SuccessfulStepfamilies.com/developmentaltasks))

### **OUT-OF-THE BOX RESOURCES**

1. Building Your Ministry pack, from Successful Stepfamilies.
2. The Smart Stepfamily, by Ron L. Deal (includes discussion questions for small groups)
3. Smart Steps / Growing in Wisdom, by Francesca Adler-Baeder & Ron Deal (curriculum for children and parents)
4. Designing Dynamic Stepfamilies, by Carri & Gordon Taylor (8-part video series)
5. The Couple Checkup ([www.SuccessfulStepfamilies.com/go/CoupleCheckup](http://www.SuccessfulStepfamilies.com/go/CoupleCheckup))
6. Live Seminars: Building A Successful Stepfamily, presented by Ron L. Deal

### **THE 30-60-80 MINISTRY CHALLENGE:**

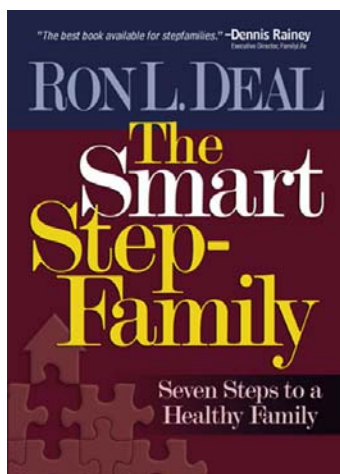
- Approximately 30% of two-adult homes are stepfamilies
- Approximately 30% of all \_\_\_\_\_ form stepfamilies
- 60% will \_\_\_\_\_, but...
- \_\_\_\_\_% can do well with early intervention, connection to a local church, and educational support.

# Successful Stepfamilies

Christian Resources for Church & Home

## *The Smart Stepfamily: Seven Steps to Stepfamily Success*

by Ron L. Deal



**"The best book available for stepfamilies..."** --Dennis Rainey, Executive Director, FamilyLife

- Perfect for **stepfamily adults and single-parents** considering remarriage.
- **Discussion questions** for remarried and pre-remarried couples.
- **Useful to therapists and ministers** who are counseling stepfamilies.

## Smart Steps / Growing in Wisdom Curriculum

by Francesca Adler-Bader, Christian supplement by Ron L. Deal

Designed for a class/workshop or support group, this adaptable six-week program (two-hours per session) uses didactic teaching, small group discussion, video clips, Power Point, and family homework (all included) to train stepfamilies in healthy living.

Includes sessions and activities for children!

