

## The Step-Grandparent Role

Stepfamilies are a common family form in the United States. When stepfamilies are formed, many new relationships are created. You may become an instant grandparent with step-grandchildren. You may have both grandchildren and step-grandchildren. Consequently, grandparenting can offer the same challenges, uncertainties, conflicts and rewards that exist in other stepfamily relationships.

You are a new step-grandparent. What does this mean? You may think: I'm not old enough or ready to be a grandparent, this interferes with dreams about the birth of my first grandchild, or will my step-grandchild like me? Will I like my step-grandchild? What expectations does my daughter or son and new son or daughter-in-law have? Will our family celebrations and traditions have to change? These questions and thoughts often create feelings of resentment, loss, uncertainty, and sadness.

Understanding the differences between stepfamilies and biological families may help you in your new role as a step-grandparent.

There is no such thing as instant love. Relationships build over time. To expect step-grandparents and step-grandchildren to instantly love each other is unrealistic.

First-time married families grow up together. Stepfamilies are confronted instantly with different traditions and values in everyday living.

Stepfamilies are born of loss (divorce, death or separation). The feelings that come with that loss have to be taken into consideration.

Conflict and change are normal. Recognizing this reality can help stepfamilies understand that it takes several years for stepfamilies to become a solid family unit.

Personal histories of individuals in stepfamilies are different. The parent and children have lived together longer than with the new stepparent. The new stepparent can feel like an outsider, but the children also can feel like outsiders as they see their parents with a new mate.

Remember that relationships are built over time. Your relationship and role as a step-grandparent will take time to develop. The important first steps in building a meaningful relationship with your step-grandchildren are communication and spending time getting to know each other.

You can offer children companionship, time and a listening ear. Grandparents are described as “significant others who have a great deal to do with one’s view of life.” Grandchildren who are exposed to such contact are less fearful of old age and the elderly. They feel more connected to their families.

Share these gifts with your grandchildren and step-grandchildren. Spend time one-on-one with them. Teach them a game or skill. Joke and kid with them. Listen for their concerns, as well as their joys. Use your listening skills. Offer companionship for activities they enjoy. Share your history and family traditions. Show them acceptance. Give hugs and plenty of love.

Create the grandparenting role that is comfortable to you and rewarding for your stepfamily. It is up to you to carve a role for yourself that fits your son or daughter’s new family.

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