

## **A Few Thoughts about Stepfamilies**

**Jeff and Judi Parziale**

My wife Judi and I were recently interviewed by Natalie Gillespie about what it takes to be a successful stepfamily. The first thing we learned (the hard way) was that the first few years are very tough as family members try to adjust to one another and “blend” different rules and roles and routines. Stepfamily life is not for the weak of heart. If you are considering remarriage, please take the time to get prepared. Good News has a list of websites that provide stepfamily resources. So here is our list of Do’s and Don’ts for stepfamilies.

1. **Do** find others to walk with you. It helps to have someone rooting from the sidelines. Too often stepfamilies isolate themselves. A great solution is to find a stepfamily support group near you.

2. **Don’t** only talk about your troubles to family and friends who are not in a stepfamily situation. They may react with sympathy and agree, “You’re right” or “That’s horrible” which only reinforces your trauma. Other stepcouples will respond, “Yeah, I remember that; we got through that.”

3. **Do** keep in mind that there may always be a certain amount of tension at stepfamily gatherings. Some children may never bond. Do the best you can, and accept whatever they can receive.

4. **Don’t** take it personally, especially all you stepmoms. You are nurturers by nature, and it is hard not to love freely. However, the kids’ rejection is not a personal reflection on you. The best advice we can give stepparents is to allow relationships to build slowly. Don’t take on the “parental” or “disciplinarian” role too soon.

5. **Do** leave a legacy of love. One of the best things you can do is aim to show all your kids what healthy love looks like. Love them as unconditionally as you can, and show them what a loving marriage relationship is. It may be the only one they see.

6. **Don’t** measure your success by how well the kids relate or how much they are willing to have a relationship with you. Let your standard be that you are doing what God wants you to do for them.

7. **Do** the right thing, without expectation of payment. Revel in the satisfaction of knowing you are right with Him.

8. **Don't** get into emotional "tit for tats" with your husband or wife's former spouse. The kids get caught in the middle, and the spouse starts pulling away. Everybody loses. Learn to let go of what you cannot control and don't allow yourself to be motivated by bitterness or revenge.

9. **Do** let God work on you and your spouse. Let Him do the job of changing things. Then, share the wonderful things He has done with others! Model love, grace and forgiveness to your children.

10. **Don't** expect miracles to happen overnight. Have patience in the perfecting. God often takes His time. You have to be okay with the dynamic of waiting.

Well, these are some of the lessons we learned. Perhaps you have learned others. I'd love to hear from you. In the meantime, live and love well.