

# Getting used to life in a new step-family

**Remember:** New families take time to get used to.

Sometimes when parents separate, one or even both can find a new partner.

This partner might also have kids of their own.

When adults have kids from a previous relationship, this is called a step-family or a blended family.

## Important language for blended families

First up, some key terms.

### What's a step-parent?

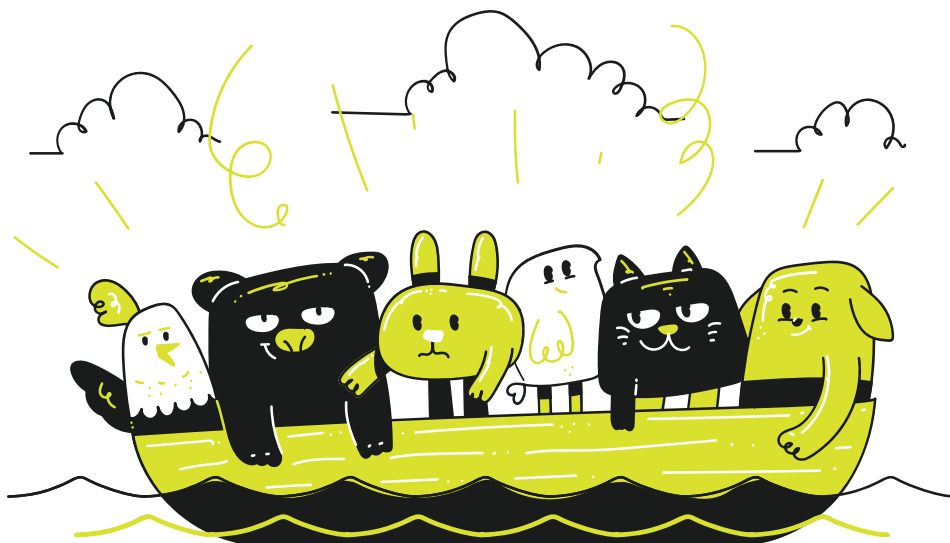
Someone who marries or moves in with your Mum or Dad after they have separated.

### What's a step-sister or step-brother?

A child born to your step-parent and their first partner. You're not biologically related.

### What's a half-brother or half-sister?

A child born to your parent and step-parent. E.g. you might have the same dad, but a different mum.



## Common feelings about blended families

Step-parents may have a bad look in fairy tales.

But in reality, **kids have all different relationships with their step-parents** – and different feelings about those relationships.

You might:

- Think of your step-parent as being just like another parent
- Think of them as more of a friend
- Not feel very close to them at all
- Find it difficult to get along with them.

All these feelings are normal. After all, you weren't counting on a new parent coming into your life!

### **It's normal to have mixed or confusing feelings about your step-family.**

You might want to reject them, but also to want to get to know them at the same time.

Maybe you really like them. Maybe you feel like you're letting your other parent down by liking them.

A lot of kids don't want to accept that their parents are never going to be together again. So, when you like your parent's new partner, this can feel very confusing and difficult.

You might feel that by getting close to a step-parent you'd be accepting that your parents won't be getting back together - when you are still hoping that they will.

**Some things get in the way of feeling close** with your step-family, like:

- Blaming them for the separation
- Struggling to find common interests
- Not liking them disciplining you.

**Here's the tricky thing:** If you are living together, you will most likely have to spend a lot of time with your step-family.

And **it might just feel better for you if you allow yourself to like them.**



## Things that can help

You may have these people in your life for many years, so it's worth trying to get along. Things that can help you connect might be:

- **Talk to your parent about the type of step-family relationship you want.**  
E.g. Tell your parent what you want kept private, or let them know if you find it difficult when your step-parent disciplines you.
- **Find common interests** – or try new things together to build some common ground. Ask about their favourite movies or music. Go bowling or ice skating, or try new types of food. You'll almost always find something in common.
- **Ask your parent for some one-on-one time.** Talk to your parent about scheduling some regular time to spend just with them (apart from your step-family). This will help you feel like you aren't losing them.

## When your position in the family changes...

**"I was always the oldest and mum's 'right-hand-man' as she used to tell me. Then she got a new partner and he had 2 kids and one of them was a boy older than me... I don't feel as important to mum now because she has him to rely on. It makes me feel useless and really sad and a bit angry too. I don't really like him."**

**CHRISTIAN, 11**

When you become a part of a 'blended family' through separation, your order in the family might change.

Maybe you're your parents' youngest child but now you're in the middle of your new step-family. Or you used to be the oldest, but now you have a big brother!

## When your place in the family changes, your sense of belonging might change too.

This can be upsetting, might shake your confidence, and can take time to understand and work out together. Your parents or a counsellor can help.

When your parents understand how you're feeling, they might be able to provide a safe space to talk about how everyone is feeling. You might find your step-siblings are finding it tricky too!



### If you get a crush on a step-sibling...

**“I really liked him, but he said I was a pain in the neck. I spent a lot of time in the bathroom making sure my hair and makeup was always right, just so he would notice me. I ended up getting into trouble from my dad and step-mum. They didn’t understand. I felt hurt and didn’t want to go to school because he was at the same school.”**

**CAITLIN, 13**

It is not uncommon for older kids to develop a crush on a step-sibling. You may:

- Want to spend lots of time with them
- Want all their attention
- Hope they notice and like you.

**It happens.** If you feel a bit weird about it – or hurt by them not liking you back – talk to someone. A parent, counsellor or another trusted adult will be able to give you some advice.

### If you’re worried about hurting your parent’s feelings...

**“I worry about lots of things, and one involves my step-mum. I don’t really want to tell Dad because it might upset him. Once I did tell him that his partner was bossing me around and he said, ‘Oh that didn’t happen’... Later I told him again.”**

**ELISA, 10**

Sometimes kids worry about hurting their parent’s feelings if they don’t like their new partner.

It can be hard if you’ve tried to say that you feel uncomfortable or awkward around them and haven’t felt heard.

**Your other parent might also be worried or upset** that you have a new step-parent. It’s normal for former partners to have difficulty adjusting to changes in each other’s homes too!

It’s also possible for you to really like your new stepparent but your other parent doesn’t. Remember that **it’s okay to feel differently to your parent about your step-parent.**

It’s also important to remember it takes time to develop a relationship with a step-parent.



## Talking helps!

Finding a space where you can talk about these worries and struggles can make a difference.

If you want to talk about what has happened in your family – or about step-families – it can be helpful to chat with a trusted adult, a school counsellor or even one of our Anchor counsellors. **Find people who listen.**

You can call this free kids helpline any time day or night:  
**Kids Helpline 24/7 1800 55 1800**

