



Helping Young Children Adjust to a Stepfamily

One in three Americans is part of a stepfamily, which is likely to be the most complex family form—especially if each partner has children from a previous relationship.

Although young children often adjust more easily than older children, it takes effort to help them transition to a stepfamily. The new family will be more successful if parents are mindful of a child's developmental stage and if they focus on building healthy relationships.

Young children often worry about being abandoned, and may fantasize that their original parents will get back together. They need to be reassured and to hear explanations again and again, since repetition is how they process, learn, and make sense of new information.

Successful stepfamilies value respect in **all** relationships, including those that existed before the new family was created.

Whether parents remarry or not, children do best when there is minimal conflict and open communication between ex-spouses, and when they continue to have access to nurturing relatives.



Another factor that helps young children adjust is having predictable house routines and rules—especially for mealtimes and bedtime. The ideal situation is to have a “parenting plan” that all adults accept and follow. Many examples and hints are available on the weblink below.

Research shows that it may take two years for stepfamilies to achieve a sense of stability. Patience and persistence lead to success!

Source Compiled by Certified Family Life Educators from articles retrieved from Tufts University Child & Family Web-Guide on June 15, 2012. http://education.state.mn.us/ParentsKnow/acrossTheNet.jsf?ageGroup=age1_2

Babies and Colic

Although all babies cry, some babies cry much more than others. This condition is known as “colic.” Colic is defined as crying that:

- Begins and ends for no obvious reason
- Lasts at least 3 hours a day
- Happens at least 3 days a week
- Continues for 3 weeks to 3 months

Although the cause of colic is unknown, the condition is temporary and won't impact your child's development. When your baby is crying, it is important to respond to him in a sensitive way.

Here are some ways to support your baby:

- Swaddle your baby. Some babies cry less when they are wrapped snugly in a blanket and gently rocked.
- Use a baby carrier. Being held close can be very soothing.
- Try different ways to hold your baby. Some babies like to be snuggled tightly against their parent's chest. Others prefer to be held faced away from you. There is no right or wrong way as long as your baby is safe.
- Use soothing sounds. Talk or sing softly to your baby.
- Offer a pacifier or other safe object to suck.
- Reduce stimulation – lights, sounds, and textures – for your baby.



If you have concerns about your child's growth and development, please talk to your child's health care provider or call 1-866-693-GROW (4769), to talk to a professional and find out how you can get connected with various resources in Minnesota.

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- Give your baby a break. When nothing works to soothe your baby, give your baby a chance to try to soothe himself by putting him down in a safe place for 5-10 minutes.

Remember the constant crying will end. However, if you are not feeling bonded to your child, you are worried you may harm your child, or your child's crying began after experiencing a life change, such as a new caregiver, be sure to contact a trusted health care professional for further guidance.

Source: "Colic and Crying," Zero to Three, <http://www.zerotothree.org/child-development/challenging-behavior/colic-behaviors.html>.

Preschool Play

Preschoolers have a lot of energy, which they use in a more organized way than when they were toddlers. Motor skills are developing. Your preschooler might show off these new skills which may include hopping, jumping forward, catching a ball, doing a somersault, skipping, and balancing on one foot. Playtime provides an opportunity to practice these skills and can include both structured and unstructured play time.

Structured play is activities that keep children within certain boundaries of play. This can be provided through games such as "Duck, Duck, Goose" and "London Bridge." Play together in the backyard or practice motor skills, such as throwing and catching a ball. Preschoolers also love trips to the playground.

Though many kids tend to gravitate toward the outdoors, lots of fun things can be organized indoors: a child-friendly obstacle course, a treasure hunt, or forts made out sheets and boxes or chairs. Here are some more ideas for structured play:

- play bounce catch
- use paper airplanes to practice throwing
- balance a beanbag while walking
- play freeze dance
- play wheelbarrow by holding your child's legs while he or she walks forward on hands

Unstructured or free play is when kids decide what to play — within a safe environment. During these times, they should be able to choose from a variety of activities, such as exploring, playing outside, or dancing around the kitchen. They might use kitchen pots and pans to make musical instruments for a parade, create a barnyard in the sandbox, or create a ship on the swing set. This is a more imaginative time for kids with fewer rules and guidelines.

Preschoolers need a balance of structured and unstructured play time. No matter what type of play, it's important to keep safety concerns in mind. Remember that preschoolers are still developing coordination, balance and judgment.

For more information visit http://kidshealth.org/parent/nutrition_center/staying_fit/fit_preschooler.html

Test your knowledge on the impact of stepparents on children?

- T F Children who are mourning the separation or divorce of their birth parents need time to heal before they can fully accept a stepparent.
- T F Stepfamilies will never be as stable as first-marriage families.
- T F Children in stepfamilies do best when positive relationships with grandparents continue to be nurtured.

Answers: 1) T, 2) F, 3) T

Mom Enough™ Podcasts



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Early Learning Digest is a publication of:



Early Learning Digest is made possible through funding from:

