

## More useful numbers and websites

### Its not your fault

A website for children, young people and parents going through a family break up.

[www.itsnotyourfault.org](http://www.itsnotyourfault.org)

### Youth Access

Will put you in touch with local contacts for counselling advice and information.

Tel: 020 8772 9900

[www.youthaccess.org.uk](http://www.youthaccess.org.uk)

Thanks to all the young people who helped with the production of this leaflet.



Parentline Plus: 520 Highgate Studios, 53-79 Highgate Road, Kentish Town, London NW5 1TL

Free Parentline: 0808 800 2222

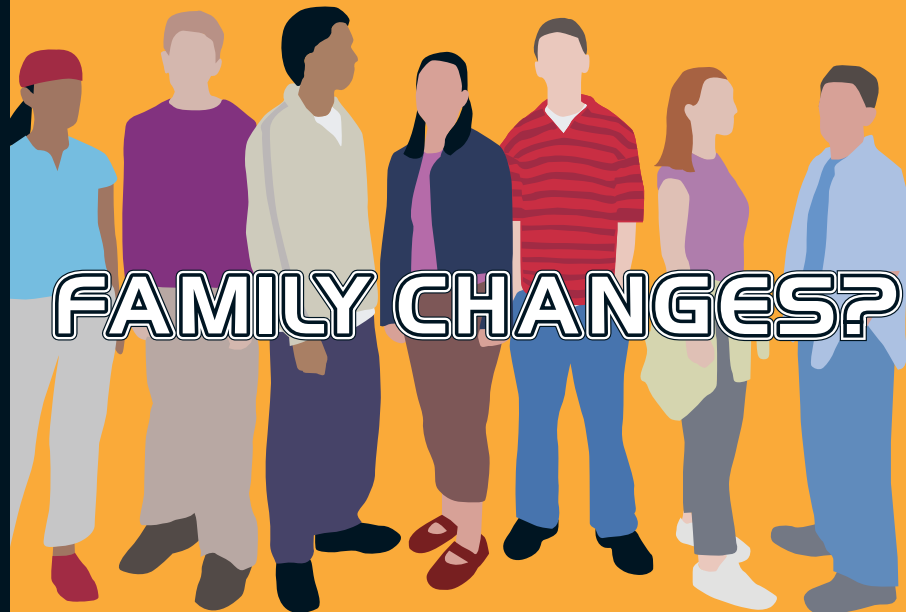
Free textphone for people who are deaf, hard of hearing or have a speech impairment: 0800 783 6783

Web: [www.parentlineplus.org.uk](http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk) Email: [parentsupport@parentlineplus.org.uk](mailto:parentsupport@parentlineplus.org.uk)

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"I THINK IT WAS BETTER THAT MY MUM AND DAD SPLIT UP BECAUSE AFTER ALL THE ARGUMENTS AND STUFF, IT WAS BETTER TO GET OUT AND START FRESH."

"I FELT VERY UPSET. I TRIED TO GET THEM BACK TOGETHER, BUT THAT DIDN'T WORK SO I JUST HAD TO REALISE THAT THEY WOULD NEVER BE TOGETHER AGAIN."

"I THINK MY STEPMUM IS ALRIGHT, BUT I DON'T SHOW IT BECAUSE I DON'T WANT TO UPSET MY MUM."



## Families come in all shapes and sizes

There are lots of different sorts of families and they all have good times and bad times. No matter what anyone says, no sort is better or worse than another and the fact that they might change doesn't make them any less of a family.

### Parents sometimes decide to live apart

Sometimes things change between parents and they decide to separate. What you need to remember is that **it's not your fault** and that living apart from one of your parents doesn't necessarily mean that you can't continue to have a relationship with them. If they don't live nearby, you can always stay in touch by telephone, letters, cards or email.

### Not seeing a parent

Some young people never see one of their parents either because they've never known them, have lost contact or because they're no longer alive.

Although you might not see one of your parents for any of these reasons, it's OK to still have feelings for them, regardless of what anyone says. Also, thinking about the parent you don't see doesn't mean that you don't love the parent you live with, so there's nothing to feel guilty about.

## What is a stepfamily?

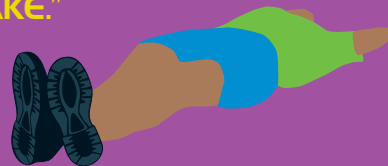
A stepfamily is when a parent is in a relationship with someone who isn't your mum or dad — and sometimes that person will have children of his or her own from a previous relationship. That's your stepfamily.

There are millions of young people growing up in stepfamilies, just like you, so don't worry about being the only one. Some are close to their stepfamily, others aren't. Living arrangements can get confusing every now and then because although some live with their parent and stepfamily all the time, others spend equal time in both parents' households or have visiting arrangements. Stepfamilies, like any other family, come in all shapes and sizes.

**"IT'S A NIGHTMARE HAVING TO LIVE WITH THEM WHEN YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW THEM."**

**"I FELT LIKE WE WERE BEING INVADED."**

**"ALTHOUGH WE WERE MOVING TO A BIGGER HOUSE BECAUSE THERE WERE MORE OF US, THERE WAS LESS SPACE... IT'S DIFFICULT TO CHOOSE WHAT TO TAKE."**



## Getting used to new people

Getting used to a new group of people, making changes and working out where you fit in isn't always easy. No one expects you to love them as soon as you meet them, in fact, you may not even like them, but that doesn't mean that you never will — as with all relationships, it takes time.

Your stepparent and their children are probably just as confused and unsure of how they feel and how to act with you. It can be hard, but take your time and be yourself. There may be other changes too, like a new baby who could be your half brother or sister. This could be great, but it could also make you feel uncomfortable. What you must remember is that people don't always get on, regardless of the sort of family they're in.

**"MY MUM USES ME TO FIND OUT WHAT'S HAPPENING AT DAD'S."**



**"I HATE HAVING TO EXPLAIN ABOUT MY FAMILY ABOUT 10 TIMES BEFORE PEOPLE UNDERSTAND."**

**"WHEN I GO AND VISIT MY DAD AT THE WEEKENDS, I DON'T FEEL LIKE IT'S MY HOME. LIKE I ASK FIRST BEFORE I GET A DRINK OR SOMETHING TO EAT."**

**"YOU BLAME YOURSELF FOR SPLITTING UP YOUR MUM AND DAD, YOU THINK IT'S SOMETHING YOU'VE DONE."**

### **Stuck in the middle**

Lots of young people feel stuck in the middle of their parents and family. If this is the case with you, it might help to tell them how you feel – they may not realise.

You may feel guilty about liking the new people in your family. You don't have to. It doesn't mean that you're turning your back on the other parent. Remember that your stepparent doesn't have to take the place of your mum or dad – you can have a very good, but different, sort of relationship. Decide on what makes you feel comfortable and explain to all those involved what you'd like and why.

### **Getting used to new arrangements**

Everyone will have to get used to doing some things differently when parents separate and particularly when stepfamilies are created.

These developments could mean moving to a new house or a new area, or it could even mean them moving in with you. To make things easier for yourself under these new arrangements, remember that it's about give and take, talking things over and making compromises to accommodate this new part of your life. If you go and stay with your parent and stepfamily, it's important that you find your own space, move at your own speed and spend time with them – all the things you would do if this was your permanent home.

# EMOTIONS COME THICK AND FAST

## Talking about it

Everyone has different experiences of being in a stepfamily. For some it's really great, but others have a hard time adjusting.

Either way, when you become part of a new family, things change. It's OK to admit that you might be finding things difficult – it's important to tell someone how you feel. Sometimes, just talking can make things seem a bit easier to cope with. If you need a listening ear, try parents, grandparents, stepparents, aunts, uncles, brother, sister, friends, teacher, youth worker, school nurse, social worker, neighbour, ChildLine or anyone else you feel comfortable with. Writing things down might also help to get things off your chest, whether it's in a diary or a letter – you don't have to post it if you don't want to.

**"IT'S NOT AS BAD AS IT FIRST SOUNDS."**

**UPSET, CONFUSED, ANGRY,  
SAD, SCARED, RELIEVED,  
SHOCKED. THESE  
FEELINGS ARE NORMAL  
AND EXPERIENCED BY  
EVERYONE AT VARIOUS  
TIMES THROUGHOUT  
THEIR LIVES.**



## Having a say

You're part of the family too and have a right to have a say in the family decisions that affect you. However, there's a difference between having a say and being made to make choices — it's unfair if anyone tries to make you choose between parents or families.

In order to have your thoughts and feelings considered as part of the decision making process, it's important that you make them clear. It may be useful to practice what you're going to say by talking to someone outside the family and once you've expressed yourself your family have no excuse to not know how you feel about things. Don't worry about upsetting them or making them feel angry by expressing your feelings — they may not react the way you expect. Remember however, that having a say doesn't mean getting your own way — it's about saying how you feel and being listened to. It's not always possible to have what you want, but you deserve explanations about why something is impossible and why certain decisions are made. By the same token, in the same way that you have a right to express your views and concerns, others do too. Try to put yourself in their shoes from time to time and imagine how they feel and why they say or do the things they do.

**"TRY TO GIVE THEM A CHANCE."**

## Some useful numbers and websites

### Children's Legal Centre

Free legal advice for any aspect of child law affecting a child.

**Tel: 0800 783 2187**

**Email: [clc@essex.ac.uk](mailto:clc@essex.ac.uk)**

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

### ChildLine

Free helpline for children and young people to talk to someone about any problems.

**Tel: 0800 1111**

**[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)**

### Connexions Direct

Confidential information and advice for young people 13-19 years. Support on mapping careers and help on anything affecting you personally or your school work.

**Tel: 080 800 13219**

**[www.connexions-direct.com](http://www.connexions-direct.com)**

### Cruse Bereavement Care

Information and support to anyone who has suffered the loss of a relative or friend.

**Young Persons' freephone helpline: 0808 808 1677**

### Get Connected

Free helpline that can put you in touch with help whatever the problem. Can text information to your mobile.

**Helpline: 0808 808 4994**

**[www.getconnected.org.uk](http://www.getconnected.org.uk)**

### Relate

Offers services for young people between 10-25 years whose parents are in conflict or separating. Family counselling is available too.

**Tel: 0845 456 1310**

**[www.relate.org.uk](http://www.relate.org.uk)**