

# STEPFAMILIES

*Providing Education and Support*

Volume 17, Number 4

Winter 1997

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**PUBLISHED BY THE  
STEPFAMILY  
ASSOCIATION OF  
AMERICA**

## Does Living in a Stepfamily Increase the Risk of Delinquency in Children?

by Kay Pasley, EdD

**M**ost scholars who study stepfamilies have shown great interest in finding out how growing up in these families affects children. In fact, over several decades of research on stepfamilies, the most prominent research topics focus on children. While the research literature on stepfamilies continues to expand, the interest of scholars in studying the effects of these family experiences on children has not diminished.

From this body of literature, findings show that children's behavior and development is affected by the type of family in which they reside. Overwhelmingly, the results suggest that children who live in a single-parent or stepparent family are at greater risk for a range of negative outcomes, including higher rates of juvenile delinquency. We know that these negative outcomes have to do with a number of things, like the nature of the parent-child relationships (or the stepparent-stepchild relationships), how parents supervise and monitor their children's behavior, and influential factors in the broader context, such as the quality of their peer relationships and their economic situation. However, other scholars suggest that in some instances the remarriage of one's parents may serve a protective function, in part because it improves

children's economic condition. We also know that preadolescent children compared with either younger or older children are especially vulnerable to negative outcomes when changes in their life occur like parental remarriage.

To date little research exists to help us understand exactly how early family experiences affect children. We need to be able to determine which children are and are not at risk for poor outcomes. Also, understanding how certain family experiences may promote negative child behaviors can help professionals develop appropriate prevention and intervention strategies that foster children's adjustment.

A recent study by Chris Coughlin and Samuel Vuchinich published in the *Journal of Marriage and the Family* offers us some insights here. They studied the family experiences of 194 male children at age 10 to predict their later involvement in delinquent acts (police arrests) at age 17. Specifically, they examined how parent-child relations, parenting practices, family structure, peer relationships, family problem-solving, child's intelligence, and socioeconomic factors influence the risk of juvenile delinquency. Previous studies had shown two common pathways through which children

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# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Margorie Engel



**W**e agreed to have breakfast together prior to our SAA board meeting about a year ago. Just as I was ready to bite into my waffle, Judith told me that when she left office, she and the board wanted me to replace her as president of this exciting organization.

Huh, me?

Told her I'd have to think about it. Wouldn't you? I loved my role as Chair of

Educational Resources so the question I had to answer was: Could I be of further services to this organization, to you the members, and to the growing numbers of stepfamilies in the United States? I talked to other members of the board and my mentors, Emily and John Visher. Turned to my husband, Steve, and my graduate school committee chairman, Len. Discussed it with my daughters. I thought on it, and slept on it, and thought on it some more.

Obviously, you know what the answer was. Let me tell you why. I'm a second wife, a mother, a stepmother, and a stepgrandmother. I'm a woman who can relate to many of the issues I've read about while reviewing stepfamily books - the importance of the remarried couple relationship, the dynamics between stepparent and stepchild, and the merging of two sets of children into one household. Oh, And I mustn't forget the Norman Rockwell holidays that we all routinely experience. Okay, the bad news is that not all stepfamily problems have been solved. The good news is that we're reading, writing, and talking about these stepfamily interpersonal relationships and we know we're not alone with any of our situations or feelings. But, up to this point, the Association focus has been on therapeutic ventures - couple and family counseling with SAA-trained professionals, group sharing through chapter meetings, or self-help with reading/bibliotherapy - in other words, how we as individuals can adapt and change. But the stepfamily picture has another side - and that side is the role that laws, policies, and financial issues play in defining the cohesiveness of stepfamilies. With an educational background in finances as well as law and policy, over the next two years I can offer a public advocacy dimension to SAA.

Today, management of our personal world requires increasing knowledge about the financial impact of our laws and policies. Perhaps nowhere is this more important than in the area of complicated families - a highly private matter with, at the same time, profound social and economic implications. Because of the increase in the number of stepfamilies (formed by the remarriage of at least one of the adult parties), it is likely new laws and policies will be proposed and adopted. For those with true interest in all family values, awareness of existing unintended consequences is the first step.

For instance, have you had personal experiences with any of the following:

Overall, social norms and expectations (many of them appear to be arbitrary) for stepfamilies reflect a culture lag. The typical model for exceptions is the two-parent nuclear family model. Compared to this idealized situation, stepfamilies appear deficient. Furthermore, when laws and policies designed for first marriages are used for stepfamilies, they often produce bizarre results.

The law is not designed for the best interest of all people and family law assumes a set of realities that do not fit stepfamilies. This is particularly obvious in the general assumption that testators don't regard stepfamily relationships as family relationships. The model of assumptions for existing regulations is the first-marriage nuclear family. Perhaps this model should be expanded to incorporate the configurations of today's families.

Even though clinicians report that financial issues are a primary source of stress in stepfamilies, researches and financial service companies have paid little attention to this aspect of stepfamily. The evolution of research about remarriage and money management indicates needed depth and clarification in the legal/financial treatment of stepfamilies.

The private sector has not yet addressed remarriage and stepfamily needs as separate and distinct from first marriages with respect to banking and credit, various forms of insurance, home sale/purchase, retirement security, medical directives, inheritance, or financial responsibilities to children and extended family members.

We all know that dated ideas die hard - maybe because they begin so early. Under the influence of Walt Disney's Cinderella, my five-year-old stepgranddaughter queried her mother, "Was Mormee (her name for me) wicked to you?" After being assured that Mormee was usually a loving stepmother, Bridget nodded agreement and continued sorting out her family tree. "Then Beth and Jenny are your stepsisters, right?" Her mother, Wendy, complimented her ability to make these connections - whereupon a puzzled Bridget announced, "But, they're not ugly!" And thereby begins another generation of dealing with the myths and theories of folklore that project negative symbolism on our families. Myths can be dissected, examined, and discarded when found destructive and untrue. Updating our laws and policies is not simple. The Stepfamily Association must speak up for all stepfamilies and make our collective voices heard.

So, send us your questions about - and experiences with - the effects of current laws, policies, and financial management on your family. Tell us what works and what doesn't. Contribute stories to the Stepfamily quarterly. Let us know if you're willing to work on policy awareness and change at the grassroots level. Remember, we're a membership organization. And it reflects you, whom we (your officers and board members) depend on, to keep our feet to the fire and our eyes on stepfamily values.

Can we complement our relationship programs with an advocacy role for SAA? Time will tell. □

## STEPFAMILIES

A Publication of The Stepfamily Association of America, Inc.

Editor: Lynn Naugle Haspel

The Stepfamily Association of America is a non-profit educational organization founded in 1979 by Emily and John Visher to promote personal and family support through information, education and advocacy for stepfamilies. Stepfamilies is published quarterly by the Stepfamily Association of America, Inc. The publication is free to members of the Stepfamily Association of

America; non-member annual subscriptions are \$14.00, \$16.00 for foreign subscribers, and \$22.00 for institutions. Subscription orders, membership inquiries or questions concerning delivery should be sent to the Stepfamily Association of America, Inc., 650 J Street, Suite 205, Lincoln, NE 68508. Toll-free: (800) 735-0329 • Fax: (402)477-8317 • Website: <http://www.stepfam.org>.

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# COUNSELOR'S CORNER

Robert Klopfer, L.C.S.W.  
Director, Stepping Stones Counseling Center

*As was stated in the last Counselor's corner, as a matter of policy, we will announce the population for which the column is best suited. This column is directed to **Counseling Professionals**.*

**T**he most recent Professional Training Series held in Philadelphia at Chestnut Hill College was very successful. Participants commented on the quality of the presentations, the sense of community, and the clinical insights gained. The training was divided into two parts, Level I and II. This column is based on a dialogue between one of the two leaders of the Level II training, and a participant.

Level II began with Dr. Scott Browning delivering an opening lecture on Stepfamily Therapy. This was followed by a therapy session observed through a one-way mirror with Dr. Patricia Papernow seeing the standardized patient family. Four well-trained graduate students had gone through substantial preparation with a consultant, Dr. Rachel Kabasakalian-McKay, in order to present as a fully believable patient family. Dr. Papernow completed the session and then reentered the group in order to discuss the session that Papernow examined the opening session. Hearing her discuss the inner process that had accompanied the session was most informative and exciting. The afternoon involved Dr. Papernow presenting a lecture, and ended with a case consul-

tation generated and strongly informed by the participants.

The second day began with a panel discussion. Then a therapy session with Dr. Browning working with the same created family, followed by discussion of the session with the family themselves out of character. The final afternoon was composed of a second complex case presented by a participant. At the conclusion of the two days, Dr. Kay Pasley, an authority on research involving stepfamilies, came and addressed the participants on the intersection of research finding and clinical issues.

What became evident from the experience was that Level II became a more complete training experience than either trainers or participants had expected. The lectures served to highlight didactic information that was of interest. While the live therapy sessions created an experiential/clinical piece, which was designed to be the hallmark of the Level II training. The surprise component was the rewarding group process that emerged. Dr. Papernow's extraordinary comfort in keeping participants involved in the process created a collegial respect that is rare in a training setting.

Although there were a great many of issues raised during the Level II training, the following three points-of-interest flowed directly from the therapy sessions.

In working with the family, assumptions were made about

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## STEPFAMILIES/DELINQUENCY RISKS

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come to be involved in delinquency. One path is through early involvement in antisocial behaviors that then continue into adulthood, and one's family experiences are believed to be of primary importance here. The second path is through engaging in deviant behaviors around age 14 that dissipate by adulthood. In this pattern, one's peers are more influential than is one's family.

Findings from their study showed that being in a stepfamily rather than residing with to be biological parents more than doubled the risk of juvenile delinquent behavior. This was not surprising given the findings in earlier studies. However, when they looked more carefully to determine what protected children from delinquency, the picture became more complex. For example, their results showed that having good peer relations at age 10 (rather than being rejected by one's peers) was a protective factor against police arrest (the measure of delinquent behavior) at age 17 for boys in all types of families (two-parent, biological; stepfamily; single-parent family). Unique to boys in stepfamilies was the protective effect of the family's ability to solve problems, which reduced the odds of arrest by about half. Importantly, family problem-solving did not protect chil-

dren in either single-parent families or two-parent, bio-families from these negative outcomes. In fact, for boys in single-parent families, problem-solving increased their risk for delinquency because of the over-emotional involvement between mothers and sons that was common in these families. Their findings also confirmed characteristics, including the structure of the family, exerted the greatest effect on the early onset of delinquency rather than affecting delinquency initiated after age 14.

These findings have several implications for professionals working with stepfamilies in reducing the risk of children's engagement in delinquent behaviors. First, all else being equal, all young males regardless of their family structures need assistance in developing and maintaining positive relationships with their peers. For boys in stepfamilies who have yet to reach adolescence, prevention and intervention strategies need to be directed toward developing problem-solving skills. In this way, the quality of the step-parent-stepchild relationship is likely enhanced as is the child's ability to make better choices about whether to engage in certain behaviors. □

## COUNSELOR'S CORNER

Continued from page 3

the young adult who was suddenly a member of a stepfamily. Initially, the position taken was to assist the adult child in continuing what was perceived as a natural launching from the stepfamily. The particulars of this character helped the collective of trainers and participants to realize that this young child needs to be able to integrate into her new stepfamily. This important step appeared contrary to developmental theory for a young adult, but was necessary in order for her to feel a solidarity with her father and the new stepparent. Completing this process was the necessary first step in later being comfortable in moving away from the stepfamily. In our effort as therapists to respect the developmental stage of a young adult, we might forget that the developmental process may have slowed for a reason. An adult child might be inclined to gain a sense of safety in the stepfamily that appears to the stepparent as a regression. As clinicians, great care must be taken in addressing the topic. Our helping to move an adult child out of the new stepfamily might be more based on our concern for parental friction, or some generic idea of launching, rather than flowing directly from the needs of the young adult.

A second clinical issue was the reinforcement of the principles of *respect for multiple realities* and how it impacts on the therapist's unconscious *parallel processes* during interviews with stepfamilies. Respect for multiple realities in stepfamily counseling is particularly important because in early stepfamily development the individuals usually have limited understanding of the other family members.

As the workshop participants discussed their reactions to the standardized patient family interview, the themes of inclusion-exclusion and the acceptance of the intimate outsider were explored. They were explored as responses to the clinical material witnessed and as shared personal responses to the workshop participants real-life experiences. The interview with the standardized patient family and subsequent shared group reactions allowed a deep level of acceptance and trust to be established within the training group. This allowed for an experiential, as we as, didactically understanding of the effectiveness of appropriate therapeutic intervention in stepfamily counseling – an unanticipated but most favorable benefit of the Level II training. Instructors and participants agree that the recognition of the intensity of this duality of experience, cognition was a major criteria for the success of the training.

A third component of the training-group process was the workshop participants' chance to experience two instructors working as therapists with the standardized patient family and then as leaders in their workshop group. The workshop leaders created role-models of openness, acceptance, and respect for differences that empowered the workshop participants to trust in their leadership. This facilitated openness within the participants' group. This significant level of trust came from an open, non-defensive discussion of the leaders' strengths and weakness in their therapy session with the standardized patient family. It demonstrated a healthy co-parenting attitude that permeated the workshop experience. The emotional well-being of the stepfamily is significantly

enhanced by the establishment of a solid foundation of trust in the step couple. The participants had close to real-life stepfamily experience of positive sharing of parental power.

For this workshop participant, the positive impact of the training had direct impact on clinical practice. While acting as a workshop leader at a Women's Health Day Conference the week after the training a sense of confidence and empowerment was noted in his manner of presentation. A qualitative difference in how he perceived his leadership role in the discussion that followed the presentation and the content issues were addressed was clear.

The next Level II Training will be offered at the SAA Professional Training Workshops in Alameda, California in April 1998. The group will be limited in size to a maximum of twelve participants. □

Stepfamily Association of America, Inc.

*Providing Education and Support*

**STEP FAMILY  
ASSOCIATION OF  
AMERICA**

**PROFESSIONAL  
TRAINING  
INSTITUTE  
TRAINING LEVELS I & II**

**APRIL 3 – 4, 1998  
Alameda, California**

**Stepfamily Association  
of America**

650 "J" St., Suite 205  
Lincoln, Nebraska 68508

**1-800-735-0329**

# Stepping Together:

Creating Strong Stepfamilies



*Emily & John Visher*

# THERAPY

WITH

# STEPFAMILIES

by B. Visher, Ph.D.

and

S. Visher, M.D.

“Stepping Together: Creating Strong Stepfamilies” \$14.95

“Stepping Together” Program Packet \$59.95

Packet includes participant and leader manual and a copy of “**Therapy with Stepfamilies**” by Emily B. Visher, Ph.D. and John S. Visher, M.D.; published by Brunner/Mazel. For details on how to order books and program materials, contact

*Stepfamily Association of America, Inc.*

**1-800-735-0329**

## DIRECTOR'S REPORT

By Larry Kallemeyn

**C**hestnut Hill College in the beautiful rolling hills of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, provided a perfect setting for SAA's Professional Training Institute which was held on October 31 and November 1. This was the first Professional Training Institute I attended since joining SAA and I must say I was truly impressed. The institute faculty was, without exception, one of the finest group of professionals I have encountered. Having been involved in helping organize the institute, I was well aware of the credentials and outstanding reputation these individuals had in the stepfamily field. What I was not aware of, however, was the sincere level of commitment and passion these individuals had in helping others understand stepfamily dynamics and their willingness to help us

learn how we can best help step-families work through the myriad of issues they experience.

The positive response we received from those participating confirmed that SAA's development of the Institute was well worth the effort and should be continued. For those that were present, we look forward to seeing you again. For those interested in attending for the first time, we look forward to your attending SAA's next scheduled Professional Training Institute offering Levels I and II training in Alameda, California on April 3-4, 1998. □



## STEP WRITE UP

by Rick Harper, M.F.C.C.

Dear SWU,

Here come the holidays. Our stepfamily of six consists of myself, Becky, my son Steve, my husband Bill, our two children Karen and Brad and one of Bill's two children, Oscar. I know the holidays are a hectic time for many families but for stepfamilies they can become a nightmare.

All of the family and extended family dynamics, plus mandatory visitations, get paraded through the tentative calm it took a years effort to establish. Various visiting in-laws, ex-laws and friends conflict with each other at times, disrupting our stepfamily. It takes months to get everything back to normal.

How do I deal with all the jealousy, back biting, pettiness, conflicting demands, blatant bartering for affection, attempts to polarize the children and keep our stepfamily reasonably intact, at least sane? Sometimes, I'd just as soon Santa et al stay home.

Becky

Dear Becky,

The surest answer, in a perfect world, is to point out the negative affects these behaviors have on everyone, especially the children. Mature adults can understand this and act appropriately. Unfortunately, maturity does not correlate well with chronological age. For this reason, it is best to expect each respective individual to act exactly as they have in the past. This is a long winded way of saying no two situations are alike. Therefore, there is no right answer.

However, I can pass on some of what I've had other stepfamilies tell me worked for them.

- \* Limit holiday activities to immediate members of the stepfamily
- \* Only include those who contribute to the welfare of the group
- \* Schedule visitations to minimize conflicting parties
- \* Visit them rather than having them visit you
- \* Set limits on gift amounts and prearrange gatherings, no drop-ins
- \* Meet with ex's in controlled locations i.e. restaurants, museum
- \* Plan holiday excursions to remote locations
- \* Identify public sites for gatherings i.e. amusement parks, picnics

The key to dealing with the holidays is pre-planning, enlisting the entire stepfamily as a team in developing and implementing the holiday game plan. Often, the children will have a better idea of what a childish adult requires. Keep in mind, it is not your responsibility to deal with other peoples issues, nor is it within your power to satisfy everyone. Your stepfamily will pull together with common goals and perhaps have some fun doing it.

If you occupy the middle between disagreeable people you will only find them turning on you while avoiding the real problem, each other. By giving your full attention to enjoying the holidays and sharing the joy with those who feel the same way, you will have little time for those who would rather spoil their own happiness. They'll wind up on Santa's naughty list. Even the Grinch is smarter than that, so, Happy Holidays to those of good will. □



### Stepping Together

*Stepping Together: Creating Strong Stepfamilies (Vishers, 1997, \$14.95)*

**D**id you know it has been estimated that by the year 2010 there will be more remarriage families than any other type of family in the United States? That means a lot of people are already in need of information, support, and advice in order to successfully manage their daily lives.

Most people have no accurate view about the pleasures and obligations that come with a remarriage. They pay little attention to laws or psychology as they form new relationships. With preconceived notions about “how things should be,” remarried couples and their children often find themselves requiring increasing knowledge about the world of stepfamilies.

Our debt of gratitude to Emily and John Visher continues to grow. It is not enough to simply create a vision; one must also provide the means to enable that vision. Not content to rest on their laurels as the founders of the Stepfamily Association of America and as the authors of numerous professional books on stepfamily life, the Visher team has just completed an updated ***Stepping Together*** program. It is anchored in today’s social realities.

***Stepping Together*** provides the essential information which research has proven is so helpful to stepfamilies during the earlier phases of integration. We are always confronted by the gap between what we know from a life in the past and what we want to know about the world of remarriage. Since it isn’t simple or uncomplicated, you can get a handle on stepfamily life by looking to ***Stepping Together*** for information, proposals, solutions, and concrete ways to fix things. A number of authors do make concrete suggestions, but often fail to present strategic recommendations about how these can be achieved in the current charged stepfamily arena. The trailblazing Visher stepfamily has put notches in the trees so others can follow.

Many of the cartoons that spice Emily and John’s seminar and conference presentations are sprinkled throughout this work designed to create strong stepfamilies. Some of them remind us that there are many kinds of stepfamilies such as those formed by a divorce or a

death, those where both adults have had children from prior relationships, those in which only the women, or only the man, has had children, and stepfamilies with myriad child custody arrangements. However, because it would be quite cumbersome, the book doesn’t continually acknowledge all the variability by the vocabulary used. What it does do call to your attention the situations, emotions, and suggestions that are general in nature and can be translated by you to apply to your particular family.

Designed for approximately 12 hours of group meetings, ***Stepping Together*** covers such topics as Recognizing Stepfamily Myths, Navigating the Emotional Journey, Strengthening the Couple Connection, Understanding the Children, and Working Across Households. It is a richly detailed picture of stepfamily life and the strategies necessary to strengthen it. A Leader’s Manual is available for those wishing to lead educational groups. However, the Participants Manual is sold separately and can also be helpful to families when no course is available. The design of the material is flexible enough to be adapted for larger groups and differing time frames.

As always, Emily and John remind us that many times after a remarriage, the adults become so involved in trying to create “one big happy family” that they forget it was because of their relationship that they got married in the first place. “Solidifying and nourishing your couple relationship is of the utmost importance, not only for the two of you, but also for your children. They need the model of a couple that works together to give them ideas for their ideas for their own couple relationship in the future.” The Vishers continue by pointing out that a united couple then is able to work together to meet the important and challenging needs of the children that arise throughout the life of the stepfamily.

If you feel as if you are putting together a giant jigsaw puzzle for which you only have a few pieces, don’t just muddle through. Reach for ***Stepping Together*** and let Emily and John clue you in. □

# Being All You Can Be As A New Stepfamily

By Dayna Osborne, M.Ed., LPC

**A**ccording to current research, 95% of divorced individuals eventually remarry. Unfortunately, the success of these marriages vary. Second marriages are failing at a rate of 76% within five years, third marriages at the rate of 87% and fourth marriages at the rate of 93%. Second marriages involving children make up 70% of all second marriages. Frequently, the failure of these step or blended family marriages are related to unresolved stepchild issues.

On the positive side of merging two families, some couples do a splendid job of creating very special families. As a mom of one son and a stepmom of four sons ages 18 to 27, I am aware of the numerous challenges these families face. What is it that these couples do which makes the difference between splendid and disaster? During my nine years of stepfamily living, I have discovered our basic ingredients of success which are Support, Time, Education and Preparation.

Divorce, like a severe storm, rips peoples' lives apart, leaving a wake of destruction. The same people who would think logically about repairing their house might not think so clearly about taking time to heal after divorce. They need to give themselves and their children time to heal and regain stability in their lives before getting involved in a new relationship. How much time is necessary? Research indicates two to five years. A safe way to start being around members of the opposite sex is in the context of a support group or a singles group. When you decide that you are ready to begin dating, be very selective and steer clear of what drove you crazy in your former spouse. Go slow, and have some fun!! Make friendship your goal and avoid premature physical involvement by setting boundaries. Don't do anything you wouldn't want your kids to do! If the relationship should become serious, setting a reasonable period of engagement would allow time to make decisions and plans and give the children time to adjust. Let them express their concerns and talk them through. Think of **Time** as your friend.

What are the elements of **Preparation** for remarriage? Ask yourself the following questions: Has our relationship started off on a solid foundation of friendship, respect, trust, honesty and openness? Am I emotionally and spiritually secure? Am I looking to be nurtured and rescued or do I have something to give? Do we have common interests, values, beliefs? Do we understand and tolerate our differences? Do I possess maturity, patience, flexibility, stamina and commitment? What do I really want from this relationship? How will remarriage affect my children? Have we discussed everything including childbearing, housekeeping, food, money, and religion? How will we make time for ourselves, and our children? **Preparation** is your foundation.

Just as information about divorce recovery is a guiding beacon through that process, **Education** about the unique aspects of stepfamily living is important for the adjustment and blending of the new family. Just knowing what to expect

can make a big difference. Attend a class and read some books. Learn some new communication skills. The task of the blended family is to move from one to two biological mini-families to a family united by a strong couple. This goal requires change for everyone. The family is forming a new identity! How well the family blends is determined by the strength of the couple relationship and how well they work together toward that goal.

In stepfamilies the interests of the couple and children collide. The children want to maintain closeness with their biological parent while the couple wants and needs special time alone. Who has priority? Time, energy, space and money are resources that must be divided many ways. Planning is very important. By allowing special one-on-one time, first for parent and child and then later, for stepparent and child, eventually the family will begin to click. Children may feel torn by loyalty conflicts between their biological parent and stepparent. As a result, they may try to sabotage the marriage. Children moving back and forth between households need emotional space to adjust. The visitation process can cause everyone a lot of stress, especially during the holidays. Negative talk about the absent biological parent should be avoided. The biological parent needs to take the dominant role in discipline, initially. Design a stepparent role that works for the child and begin with friendship and respect. Having a spiritual focus helps build family strength and unity. Family devotions, mealtime blessings, attending church as a family, and praying for one another adds a richness and depth to family life. Couples most successful at forming a strong bond are somehow able to protect their relationship from the intrusion of their ex's crises, and stepchild issues. Allow time for nurturing all these new relationships. They take a lot of time to develop, but can be very rewarding. Stepfamily **Education** can be your guide.

Finally, building and utilizing a **Support** network is important for the couple and children. Everyone needs an emotional outlet outside the family and someone to encourage them when they are discouraged. You did this in divorce recovery. Remember? Networking with other blended family couples will affirm your effort, normalize your frustrations, and give you new ideas. Stepfamily adjustments can take four to seven years. The majority of couples give up and separate within four or five years. They give up before their family has formed its new identity! Things can get pretty chaotic just before a major breakthrough. The challenges for the stepfamily couple are many. But, stepfamilies can be good, if you do not give up. Let time be your friend, preparation your foundation, education your guide, and support affirm your efforts. Just take it one STEP at a time.

Let SUPPORT affirm your efforts,

TIME be your friend,

EDUCATION your guide and

PREPARATION your foundation.

# A Journey for Stepfamily Day A Dedication to the American Stepfamilies

By: Christine Borgeld

**S**tepfamily Day..why have a day to observe the Stepfamily? The many reasons lie deep within my heart. President Clinton has proclaimed every fourth Sunday in July as, "National Parents Day." This proclamation was the catalyst by which a seed was planted in me to create a day dedicated entirely to recognizing the stepfamily.

Until recently, the only involvement I ever experienced with our government was voting. I found out first hand that even the "little guy," could make a difference. "It just took that strong gut feeling in what I believed in and I acted on it with all my heart."

With the US Census bureau predicting that, by the year 2000, half of the population will be living in stepfamilies rather than nuclear families, it seemed to me that it is inevitable that the stepfamily will increasingly become more common in the new millennium.

I began to do my research. I called my state Governor and the White House to see if such a day existed. There was no day set aside to observe stepfamily. I yearned to find a way to have a day set aside. I had contacted Debra Mogg of "Life's Landmines to Landscapes," a newsletter for stepfamilies. I do freelance writing for her newsletter. I asked her to join with me in my mission. Together we reached for the stars! We decided to co-sponsor a nationwide effort to have a Stepfamily Day proclaimed in each state.

We composed a letter in July, requesting a Stepfamily Day Proclamation and sent it to President Clinton (who comes from a stepfamily), Vice President Gore and First Lady, Hillary Clinton. We also sent our request to each state's governor, senator, and representatives. In all, we sent our anticipation, the replies started coming in from the U.S. Senators, Congressman and Governors. The response was positive with encouragement. At the same time, many of them were anxious to share with us their own stepfamily stories. I felt genuinely blessed and honored that so many people have shared their lives with me. We began to campaign even harder. I dedicated the next two months to my computer, phone, and fax. I worked 8 hours a day. With love and support from my husband and children who began to get just as excited at my dedication and efforts.

We soon learned that in order for any state to estab-

lish its own "Stepfamily Day," approval would be needed from the state's governor. We also learned that in some states, by law, a Proclamation Request cannot be accepted from anyone who lives outside that state. However, should President Clinton accept our Proclamation Request, then there would be a "National Stepfamily Day."

We are proud to announce that almost 50% our nation's governors joined with us to proclaim September 16, 1997, as Stepfamily Day. The following states set aside a day to honor our growing numbers: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

Some of the exciting stepfamily events nationwide, included extensive newspaper press coverage across the nation, Radio interviews, TV interviews, and TV commercials. Michigan school students are learning about the proclamation process and how our government works. Additionally numerous organizations, communities, counties (mayors), and parishes also issued their own Stepfamily Day Proclamation for September 16 as well.

I have been informed and encouraged by many U.S. senators, that they will bring our message and proclamation into legislation. This will be a victory not only for us but also for all stepfamilies in this nation.

Debra and I are both humbled by the monumental support that this administration gave us. We are two stepmothers, from different states, who joined together in one accord to offer support and hope to this growing type of family. As members of a stepfamily, we both have struggled and have overcome obstacles and barriers, to recognizing the stepfamily role in our nation's culture. We are pleased to inform you the Stepfamily Association of America and the Stepfamily Foundation, Inc. (two of the major nationwide stepfamily advocates) will support us in our mission of bringing education, hope, and healing throughout this land in 1998. For Debra and I, this has been a glorious mission...a historic calling...a dream come true. □

# Steps to Stepfamily Success

**P**lan to have family meetings at least once a month or, if problems arise, more often. Establish guidelines to follow.

**E**ducate Yourself! Read! Participate in stepfamily workshops and SAA chapter support meetings.

**T**ime alone as a couple is valuable. Spend at least 20 minutes of relaxed time alone with each other every day.

**S**trengthen the couple relationship. Use good positive communication skills. Develop leadership as a couple. Fight fairly!

*And the smartest step to stepfamily success is to join SAA now! Complete the application form below.*

## SAA MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

*Send checks to: SAA*

650 J Street, Suite 205

Lincoln, NE 68508

Or use your VISA or Mastercard and call 1-800-735-0329

One-year Membership in SAA = \$35.00 (which includes the book *Stepfamilies Stepping Ahead*)

Stepfamily Association of America, Inc.

*Providing Education and Support*

650 J. Street, Suite 205

Lincoln, NE 68508

*Address Correction Requested*

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