

STEPFAMILIES



A Quarterly
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ASSOCIATION OF
AMERICA

Inside

General Interest:

SAA Website p. 2
 Children's Rights Council p. 2
 Stepfamilies and the Law:
 Grandparent Visitation Rights
 p. 3
 Director's Message p. 4
 Chapter Highlights p. 5
 Recommend SAA p. 5
 Chautauqua p. 6
 Kids' Corner p. 6
 Words From the Editor p. 6
 To the Rescue p. 7

Professional Section:

Research Update: Stepmothers'
 Perceptions of Kinship p. P1
 Professional Affiliates Needed
 p. P2
 Book Review p. P3
 Unique Assessment Instruments
 for Stepfamilies p.P4
 April: Professional Training
 Institute in Philadelphia p. P5
 Donors in 1999 p. P6
 We're Looking for Stories:
 Stepfamily Weddings p. P6

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Margorie Engel, MBA, Ph.D.

This is a confusing time. It is an exciting time. And there is no denying the evidence. While it may be a few more years before we have full acceptance of all types of families, the heart of stepfamilies in the United States has begun to beat.

Curled up in my overstuffed office chair during the wee hours of the morning, I'm reading about complicated families. A six-year-old is caught between two countries. His maternal and paternal grandparents and his dad and stepmother want him back in Cuba. Miami relatives want him to stay in the United States. Politics confound the issue.

"Grandparents' rights face high court test," is the headline for a U.S. Supreme Court case that raises emotional questions about the rights of parents and relatives and how the law should respond to evolving notions of "family." In other cases, the non-biological "parent" in separating homosexual couples want the government's help arguing that they have had a parental relationship and should remain part of the child's life. Some family law experts want to focus on who has taken on the responsibility of performing as a parent. Let's add stepparents to that short list.

Presidential hopeful Donald Trump admits that he has failed as a husband but said, "Marriage is not the only family value that matters. The importance you give to your relationship with your kids is a family value. So is your relationship with your parents, your sisters and brothers." Let's add stepparents to his list.

The media has discovered stepfamilies. Print stories are in every newspaper and magazine. Radio and television have added

stepfamily segments. The majority of them still grab our attention with some horror tales. Part way through, however, even the sensationalized stories and segments are adding helpful information - how to talk with children about your pending remarriage, tips for creating joyous holidays for "jumbled families," encouraging biological parents to assume the primary disciplinarian role, and how to reach the Stepfamily Association of America for ongoing information and support.



One leading company has stepped forward to support stepfamilies in a positive way. While this company has always offered cards that could be used for stepfamily occasions, Hallmark earns an enthusiastic thumbs-up from SAA for an entirely new line of cards called "TiesThatBind" that are designed specifically for today's non-nuclear families. These TiesThatBind cards are the direct outgrowth of business, trends, and consumer research from Hallmark. The card company estimates that "two of every three consumers who go into a Hallmark store or department are part of a non-nuclear family."

Through their research and development process, Hallmark established that people like to use cards to nurture relationships and express themselves. Their new cards are right for the times. They say what people want to say to and about each other. And card buyers are no longer satisfied with tag lines such as: "someone like

Continued on page 2



President's Message

Continued from page 1

mother" or "for Mom and her husband." Hallmark's focus groups strongly discouraged all forms of the word "blended" and encouraged the card company to help people say what they feel and to support establishing and strengthening relationships.

TiesThatBind cards get right to the heart of the matter when they recognize things aren't always smooth in stepfamilies, especially in the chaotic early years – *I guess I don't need to tell you that it wasn't easy for me to accept you at first. But with time, I've come to know you better and I've grown to respect you. I'm sorry for the times I've taken my confusion or anger out on you unfairly.*

And that connections come slowly and indirectly, but they do exist – *You and I share a special bond that comes from loving the same wonderful person. Thank you for all you've done to make my dad so happy. Happy Birthday.*

Stymied about what to say to a stepsibling without getting too mushy? One TiesThatBind card suggests – *Each year I feel closer to you, more connected...and even more grateful that life has given me a sister like you.*

Hallmark's TiesThatBind line has a number of cards that stepparents will want to send to stepchildren. For instance – *We don't have the same roots, but I'm glad we ended up in the same family. I would have missed out on a lot of good things if we hadn't. Happy Birthday.*

These are a few examples of how Hallmark is now helping those of us in stepfamilies to communicate with the important people in our lives. There are 100 more everyday cards in this new TiesThatBind group. Look for them wherever Hallmark cards are sold. Tell other stepfamilies about the cards. Give us your feedback and drop a note to Hallmark with your appreciation for their work on our behalf. (Ms. Rachel Bolton, Public Relations, Hallmark Cards, Inc., 2501 McGee Street, Kansas City, MO 64108 or <rbolto2@hallmark.com>.)

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The Children's Rights Council is a non-profit, tax exempt organization strengthening families and assisting children of separation and divorce.

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STEPFAMILIES

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Editor: Jean McBride, MS, LMFT

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GRANDPARENT VISITATION RIGHTS

Introduction

The United States Supreme Court heard arguments on January 12, 2000, in the case of *Troxel v. Granville*. In this case, the Court will consider the rights of grandparents, and perhaps other third parties such as former step-parents, to visit children over the objection of the children's biological or adoptive parents. It is one of the rare times the Court will consider family law, and it could prove decisive in how the states must define a "family" and how far states will be permitted to intrude into family life.

Grandparent Visitation Rights Generally

Historically, grandparents had absolutely no right to visit or communicate with a grandchild when a parent forbade such contact. In the 1970s and 1980s, however, all states enacted legislation that granted grandparents and/or third parties visitation rights. The states justified these statutes under its authority as *parens patriae*, that is, its authority to act in the best interests of its children citizens.

The statutes granting grandparents the right to petition for visitation fall into two general categories. Under the first most typical kind, grandparents may petition for visitation of their grandchildren only where there has been some kind of disruption of the "intact family," i.e., divorce, death of a parent, adoption, or termination of parental rights. This type of statute has been enacted in Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wyoming. Under the second kind of statute, there does not need to be any kind of disruption of the intact family. Rather, a grandparent can petition for visitation so long as such visitation would be in the best interests of the child. This type of statute was enacted in Connecticut, Delaware, Idaho, Kentucky, Montana, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin.

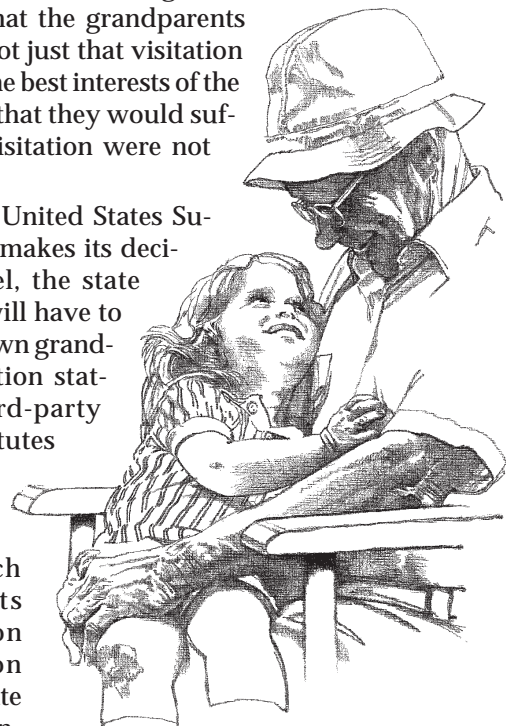
In recent years, the second type of statute has come under attack as being an unconstitutional infringement

upon the right of the parents to decide with whom their children may associate. The Wisconsin Court of Appeals was the first state to agree with this argument, and decided that the grandparent visitation statute was unconstitutional. Soon thereafter, the courts in Connecticut, Kentucky, North Dakota, Tennessee, and Washington held their statutes unconstitutional as applied.

Given the trend of courts finding greater parental authority and autonomy, the first type of statute also came under attack. The courts in Florida, Georgia, and Nevada also held their grandparent visitation statutes unconstitutional, and the court in Virginia restricted the rights of grandparents under the Virginia statute by holding that the grandparents must prove not just that visitation would be in the best interests of the children, but that they would suffer harm if visitation were not granted.

When the United States Supreme Court makes its decision in *Troxel*, the state legislatures will have to revisit their own grandparent visitation statutes and third-party visitation statutes to make sure that the circumstances under which grandparents may petition for visitation does not violate the fundamental rights of the parents of the children to raise their children as they see fit.

No matter what the Supreme Court decides, however, concerning when a grandparent or other third-party may petition for visitation of children, visitation must always be in the best interests of the child. The starting point for determining whether grandparent visitation will serve the best interests of the child is to analyze the grandparent-grandchild relationship. Courts examine the length of the relationship and frequency of actual contact as pri-



Continued on page 4

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

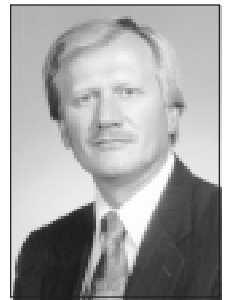
By Larry Kallemeyn

Hopefully all of you successfully navigated into 2000 without too much difficulty. I have not yet decided if the lack of a disaster that could be attributed to Y2K was due to great planning and effort or if the whole thing was just a ploy to generate worry and spend a lot of money. As with most things, it probably was a little of both.

This past year has been an exciting one for SAA. We have made continued progress toward meeting our strategic goals and we look forward to even greater accomplishments in providing you service during the coming year. We believe the upcoming changes being planned

and new opportunities to provide greater advocacy, information and support, will be of benefit to all our members.

SAA's Board of Directors and staff recognize the growth we have experienced could not have occurred without your ongoing support through membership, purchase of materials and your generous gifts. On behalf of stepfamilies across the country, we thank you for your commitment and look forward to a successful new year.



Grandparent Visitation Rights

Continued from page 3

many evidence that the relationship should be preserved. A grandparent's mere desire for a relationship, when none exists, is generally not sufficient to impose visitation over the objections of the parents. The hostility of the parents to the grandparents is also an extremely important factor, although it is not an overriding factor. Obviously, if the grandparents were driven to bring a lawsuit against the parents for visitation, there is hostility. It is up to the court to determine whether the hostility is deep-seated, or just the inevitable result of friction over the lawsuit at issue. Finally, the court will look at the totality of the circumstances, considering tangential relationships and the family unit as a whole.

Many lawyers and psychologists agree that grandparent visitation cases are often just vicious family disputes that replay old hurts, force neutral parties to pick sides, and, worst of all, place children into the heart of adult conflicts. For this reason, all agree that grandparent visitation cases should be limited to those cases where the grandparents and grandchildren know each other well and have a deep existing bond.

The New Hampshire grandparent visitation statute lists seven factors for the court to consider, and most courts do consider these factors: (1) whether the visitation would interfere with any parent-child relationship or with the parent's authority over the child; (2) the nature of the relationship between the grandparent and the

minor child, including frequency of contact, whether the child has lived with the grandparent, and whether there is reason to believe the child would be endangered by visitation or lack of visitation; (3) the nature of the relationship between the grandparent and the parent of the child; (4) circumstances which resulted in the absence of a nuclear family; (5) the recommendation of the guardian ad litem; (6) any preference expressed by the child; (7) other factors as the court may find appropriate.

These same factors may be applied to other third-party visitation requests.

Conclusion

By the time a grandparent feels it is necessary to file a court case to force visitation with a grandchild over the objections of a parent, the rancor and hostility between the parents and grandparents are likely to be high. Mediation is often helpful in these situations, to help both sides see the positive aspects of continuing the grandparent-grandchild bond and the need to respect parental authority. Overriding both these considerations, however, must be the best interests of the child.

Bibliography

Joan C. Bohl, "Current Trends in Grandparent Visitation Law," in 1998 Wiley Family Law Update (Wiley Law 1998)

Laura W. Morgan, Grandparent Visitation Rights: Challenges and Solutions, 4 Divorce Litigation 248 (1992)

STEPFAMILIES

FOR PROFESSIONALS:

RESEARCH UPDATE

STEPMOTHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF KINSHIP: WHO'S IN YOUR FAMILY?

By Kay Pasley, ED.D

A recent study published in the *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, 31(1/2) by Dr. Elizabeth Church (1999) caught my interest for two reasons: (a) the focus was on stepmothers and SAA members are often members of stepmother families; and (b) the study provides insight into issues facing women in remarriage and reflect common themes from studies of stepfather families.

Dr. Church argues that the ways we think about "family" has a profound effect on how we act and the kinds of roles we assume; this is not a new notion, but one that many scholars share. As such, understanding how stepmothers view kinship can provide understanding of how women see their roles and the kinds of ideals they hold for themselves. She used a volunteer sample of 104 women who identified as stepmothers, and she conducted interviews about the meaning attached to this role. These women are described as white, middle-class professionals, of whom 45% had been a stepmother for 6+ years. The majority (71%) had been a resident stepmother (at least one of the stepchildren had lived with them at least half time), and 56% also had biological children.

Results showed five kinship models (Nuclear, Extended, Couple, Biological and No Family) that were associated with the ways they thought of themselves and their roles as stepmothers. What they saw as positive/beneficial and difficult corresponded to their beliefs about kin.

Specifically, 23 stepmothers believed that the NUCLEAR family was the ideal model for the stepfamily to emulate; these women wanted to be called "mom," encouraged step- and halvesiblings to refer to each other as brother/sister, and several desired to be mistaken as the biological mother. Typical behaviors included (a) limiting outside relationships with those that don't fit this

ideal, such as the in-laws and ex-wives, and (b) emphasizing their role as the primary parent/mother. This nuclear ideal was the source of conflict as they tried to live like a nuclear family unsuccessfully. For example, they had difficulty with the stepchildren's strong connection to the biological mother or the fact that they did the work of the mother without recognition.

The EXTENDED model was reflected in the lives of 28 of the stepmothers. Whereas they were similar to the nuclear model stepmothers because they considered their stepchildren kin, they were different – they did not see themselves as mothers to these children. They defined "family" more broadly and inclusive, and they viewed the expanded network positively and resulting from choice. These women saw their role as an addition to that of the biological parent (e.g., aunt), but not as mothers. As such they held the most positive views of the biological mother. Difficulties arose from the inclusionary perspective, especially when others (e.g., biological mother) failed to share it (e.g., the ex-wife made it difficult for the father to see his children).

The COUPLE model was found in 32 stepmothers who focused on the marital relationship and viewed their relationship with stepchildren as secondary. Most became stepmothers by "default," since they wanted to be married to their spouses and his children were part of the "package." They had not considered what being a stepmother might entail. Thus, both the stepchildren and ex-wives were viewed as intruders to the couple relationship. Their ideal role was that of friend to the stepchildren rather than any kind of kin relationship, although many believed they were important as a supporter of their spouses and enjoyed "fun" activities. Others had ambivalent or strained relationships. Conflict arose over the

Continued on page P2

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATES NEEDED

If you have ever considered becoming a Professional Affiliate member of SAA, now is the time to do so.

With the increased media attention on stepfamilies, we are receiving more and more calls requesting our assistance in identifying counselors and therapists who have a solid background and understanding in working with stepfamily issues.

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- Two subscriptions to SAA's quarterly publication, *Stepfamilies*
- Twenty copies of SAA's *Catalog of Stepfamily Resources* to share with your clients.
- Fifty copies of Kansas State's *Stepping Stones*. This one page informational handout is to give to clients. Handout topics covered include guidelines for parents, grandparents, and financial and legal issues.
- Access to members only services through SAA's website including: a chat room for discussion with other Professional Affiliates throughout the country, opportunities to discuss clinical questions and issues with stepfamily professionals, up-to-date annotated bibliography, access to research information on stepfamily issues and online access to SAA's quarterly publication, *Stepfamilies*.
- Inclusion in SAA's Professional Affiliate Directory in print and online through SAA's website
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- As a Professional Affiliate with SAA you will be helping to support millions of individuals throughout the country learning how to be successful in their stepfamily relations.

Contact our office today and we will send you our P.A. application and criteria.

Stepmothers & Perceptions of Kinship

Continued from page 5

perception that their spouses put the children first, and many were not also mothers.

The BIOLOGICAL model (18 stepmothers) defined their family along biological lines, emphasizing parent-child relationships. Some exclude their spouses and his children from their notion of "family" and descriptions reflect two families co-existing in one household. These women saw their role in two ways (as friends or distant/troubled), stemming from their liking of the stepchildren. They believed the biological parents should be responsible for care. For some this belief was apparent from the start; for others it was the result of their partner's lack of support for their efforts to parent. Conflict resulted when partners wanted them to assume the mother role or when his children came first. Conflict also resulted from guilt due to a lack of emotional connection of the stepchildren, or the imperative to take on the mothering role which they refused.

Only three stepmothers had the NO FAMILY model. These women felt like isolated outsiders who had conflicted relationship with their stepchildren and relationships with their spouses. In the beginning they reported both positive expectations for their relationships with the stepchildren and the ex-wives. However, they were not granted any place in the family nor were their efforts appreciated, so things deteriorated. To them, being a stepmother was only seen in negative terms.

These findings reinforce the belief that stepfamilies are diverse in the ways in which they operate and the ways members think about them. Professionals erroneously assume that stepfamilies are homogeneous, they also may assume there is "one way" to operate in a stepfamily and do a disservice when working with such families. These kinship models provide insight into the possibilities for stepmothers in stepfamilies and reflect similar models evident in James Bray's work on stepfather families in *Stepfamilies: Love, Marriage, and Parenting in the First Decade* (Broadway Books) where he describes the neotraditional, romantic, and matriarchal stepfamily patterns. Thus, there are common themes that emerge from studies that provide insight to understanding of step-relationship and stepfamily dynamics.

STEPFAMILIES: LOVE, MARRIAGE, AND PARENTING IN THE FIRST DECADE

By James H. Bray, Ph.D. and John Kelly

Okay. Finally our intuition has been confirmed by scientific study. No matter how well-meaning you are, maneuvering through the first couple of years as a stepfamily is hell for everyone – the couple and the kids. Nearly a quarter of stepfamilies fail in this short, tumultuous, conflicted period.

But *Stepfamilies: Love, Marriage, and Parenting in the First Decade* by Bray and Kelly (Broadway Books, \$13), which puts forth this thesis, doesn't end with that conclusion. The book, based on a nine-year study led by James H. Bray, a clinical psychologist, and associate professor of family medicine at Baylor College of Medicine, has a much more positive ending. Over the course of the project, the study examined 200 families (half of them were stepfamilies in which the children in the household are only biologically linked to the mother and the other half were nuclear families). It determined that when a marriage works in a stepfamily, it often works especially well.

Maybe the pure research would be dull reading (though I think not), but the book by Bray and Kelly reads like a take-off on your life. It's informative, lively, and illuminates the points it makes with evocative stories from real life experiences. One thing we learn as we read through it is that while each stepfamily is unique, there are persistent stepfamily themes that run through them — especially in their early and middle years. You might not identify with all the couples who share their seesaw existences, but you will find bits and pieces in each story that will have you shaking your head in recognition of a situation you've experienced or are in the midst of now.

Consider a few of *Stepfamilies'* conclusions.

- The success of a stepfamily is based on the choices it makes when dealing with its four major tasks: parenting (issues surrounding loyalty, discipline, guilt, jealousy); managing change (which as we all know moves at breakneck speed in a stepfamily), separating the remarriage from former marriages (too much overlap doesn't work); and dealing with the nonresidential parent (often a source of great irritation).
- After the initial "hell" years, stepfamilies coalesce into three types (not neatly, of course, since nothing is so

perfectly classified) – neotraditionalist, matriarchal, and romantic.

- Of the three, neotraditionalists are best able to forge shared values and a shared worldview – a clear "us."
- They also invalidated the theory that a stepfamily could never look like a nuclear family. Eventually, family members in neotraditionalist stepfamilies were bound closely to one another and to the stepfamily. And at the heart of this family lay a stable, satisfying marriage.
- In the matriarchal stepfamily, mom is the intellectual and emotional nerve center of the family most of the time. The marriage is nurtured by the couple's activities together, and interestingly, many matriarchal stepfamilies do very well – perhaps because of the nature of the people who enter this type of marriage and the healthy development of the children.
- The romantic stepfamily unit has the greatest potential for disaster. It's built on totally unrealistic expectations. Because it isn't able to alter those expectations to match the reality, all the good intentions and true desire for an idyllic family life is shattered.

The perceptions of both the insiders in the study (the moms and kids who came as a package to the marriage) and that of the outsiders (the stepfathers who may or may not have biological children living elsewhere) are so different in the early stages of the remarriage that that alone could destroy the marriage. The principal bridge across the seemingly insurmountable chasm is made up of mutually agreed upon compromises. Back and forth, back and forth – even if that means expressing complaints and arguing. "In order for a compromise to work," Bray states, "it has to incorporate the perspectives of both parties, and it is very hard to do that if one or both parties cannot state his or her perspective clearly and forthrightly."

For me, some of the most interesting observations didn't always show up in the useful "Points to Keep in Mind" section at the end of many of the chapters. One example is that all stepfamilies start with some unrealistic expectations. (Whew! Good to know we weren't the only Brady Bunch dreamers.) Yet if the couple can edit

Continued on page P4

UNIQUE ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS FOR STEPFAMILIES

By Dr. Jeff Larson, Chair, Marriage and Family Therapy Program, Brigham Young University

Stepfamilies are very different from nuclear families and so assessing them requires the clinician to use stepfamily-friendly instruments or questionnaires. For example, the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales (FACES) self-report questionnaire, one of the most popular short measures used in family therapy settings must be interpreted carefully to avoid pathologizing stepfamilies. If a therapist uses the norms for "all families in the national sample" when interpreting a stepfamily's results, they will likely look "chaotically disengaged." However, if one uses the stepfamilies only norm table, the therapist will be able to compare the family's adaptability and cohesion in comparison to a sample of other stepfamilies. And thus, the stepfamily will probably look less dysfunctional and more developmentally on-track.

A recent review of the literature on self-report instruments specifically designed for stepfamilies showed the results listed below (right). It notes that genograms are equally or even more important to use with stepfamilies as with nuclear families because of the rich (complicated?) history many stepfamilies present. Other self-report in-

struments are also listed. One of the most promising instruments is Crosbie-Burnett's (1989) Stepfamily Adjustment Scale which has undergone rigorous testing for validity and reliability. For more information on validity, reliability, and how to obtain these instruments you can contact me at:

E-mail to: LarsonJ@cc.byu.edu

or find many of them in these books which are available at most college libraries:

The Handbook of Family Measurement Techniques by John Touliatus, et al (1990) Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Stepparenting: Issues in Theory, Research & Practice by Kay Pasley & Marilyn Ihinger-Tallman (1995) Westport, Connecticut: Praeger.

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STEPFAMILY ADJUSTMENT SCALE (Crosbie-Burnett, 1989)

- Stepparent role ambiguity
- Mutual suitability of step relationships
- Relationship with non-custodial parent

STEPPARENT ROLE QUESTIONNAIRE

(Hetherington & Clingenpeel, 1992)

- Communication with ex-spouse
- Relationship with children
- Parental role

LOYALTY CONFLICTS ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

(Clingenpeel 1981)

CONTENT OF CO-PARENTAL INTERACTION

(Ahrns & Goldsmith, 1981)

- Cooperation & competition

FEELINGS AND ATTITUDES TOWARD FORMER SPOUSE

(Ahrns & Goldsmith, 1981)

- Guilt, anger, compassion, parenting skills, psych distance

DIMENSIONS OF ATTACHMENT TO THE SPOUSE IN DIVORCE

(Kitson, 1982)

EX-SPOUSE PRE-OCCUPATION SCALE (Berman, 1998)

ACRIMONY SCALE (Emery, 1987)

Book Review

Continued from page P3

those expectations to fit reality, the marriage has a good chance of surviving. Another, was that stepdads who at first simply monitor their stepchildren's actions (like reporting to his wife that Susie said she'll be back from her friend's at 8 p.m. or offering to pick up Sam after his ballgame) rather than dive actively into the role of fatherhood, make the transition for themselves and the kids much easier. Another was that men and women who could not free themselves from the influence of a first marriage usually ended up destroying a second. And then, there was the warning not to be surprised if your out-of-resident stepchildren move in. About 20 percent of children do take up residence with their father in early adolescence.

I've read enough books on stepfamilies to know that most have kernels of truth and a few have some good tips for parenting. But *Stepfamilies* by Bray and Kelly puts it all together in an uncommonly readable, sensible, and useful way. I would recommend it for anyone in the first five years of stepfamily life.

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SEND US YOUR STEPFAMILY WEDDING STORIES

In our summer issue we will be highlighting stepfamily weddings. We are looking for stories that inspire, support and entertain us. We're looking for good ideas, tips to pass on, and of course those really funny stories that you may not have been able to laugh at until now! Send your best wedding stories to us at SAA, 650 J St., Suite 205, Lincoln, NE 68508. Please limit your word count to 500 words. Deadline is May 1.

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS:

by Gloria Clark
Chapter Development Chair

STEPFAMILY BULLETIN

SAA WEBSITE

As we move into the new century we have many more communication resources available to us. Those of you who are starting out sometimes wonder how you will get your group known and I can tell you that it's easier because of the SAA website. I have received several calls from people who found us on the internet (www.stepfam.org). It's a good service for beginning as well as established chapters and much appreciated.

RESOURCES

Recently when I renewed my membership with SAA I found an offer for an audio tape, video tape and Stepping Stones, a home-study program from Kansas State University. The video is 35 minutes long and is good orientation material for chapter meetings. The study program and tape are useful too.

STEPFAMILY CLASS AT CHAUTAUQUA INSTITUTION July 3 - 7, 2000

Last summer John and Emily Visser (co-founders of SAA) and Margorie Engel, President of SAA, and I (Board Member and Chapter Leader) and my husband John, presented the first class on stepfamilies at the Chautauqua Institution in Chautauqua, New York. This is a 125-year-old summer community devoted to education and recreation and is located near Jamestown and Buffalo.

This year we are planning to be there again on July 3 - 7. Jerry and Helen Devine from Houston, Texas, will be stepping in for the Vissers who have a schedule conflict. The Devines are long-time Board members and are family and marriage therapists as well as stepparents. Jerry is currently the Chair of the Board for SAA. Helen has started a new, much needed Houston chapter. (They've been chapter leaders before.)

The class will be called REMARRIAGES AND STEPFAMILIES. The 5-day course provides an illustrated road map for those who are living in or are interested in stepfamilies. (For more information on this opportunity you can call 1-800-836-ARTS or on the web: www.chautauqua-inst.org). Chautauqua is a wonderful place for family vacation.

TRAINING SESSIONS

For several years SAA has held a two-part training for professionals and students seeking to gain a better understanding of stepfamilies and stepfamily dynamics. Among those who have taken these courses are family life educators as well as therapists. At the meeting in Vancouver in October of 1999, it was decided to make scholarships to the 1st session, Understanding Stepfamilies, available to Chapter Leaders. You would be responsible for your transportation and housing.

The next training will be in Philadelphia on April 7 and 8, and again in Houston, Texas on October 6 & 7. I attended one of these sessions and found it very helpful with my chapter work because part of the job of chapter leader is to educate. Call Claudia for details. 1-800-735-0329.

Recommend SAA to Friends

Do you know a stepfamily that would benefit from membership in the Stepfamily Association of America? Strength comes from numbers, especially when uphill battles for education about stepfamily dynamics have to be waged. The Association regularly provides information to the media and professionals who work with stepfamilies. We've discovered, however, that the recommendations of existing members constitute the best source of new members.

So tell other stepfamilies about SAA and what it does for members - information, education, support, and advocacy through newsletters, catalog of resources, web site, training programs, chapters, research, and board member responses to questions that are offered to members. Lend your friends a copy of the Stepfamilies newsletter. If they are interested in learning more about SAA, send their names and addresses to:

Stepfamily Association of America
650 J Street, Suite 205
Lincoln, NE 68508
or call SAA at
(800) 735-0329

An invitation and packet with background information about SAA will be sent immediately to the prospective member.

SAA AT THE CHAUTAUQUA INSTITUTE

CHAUTAUQUA, NEW YORK
JULY 3 – 7, 2000

*Chautauqua is a summer community
dedicated to education and recreation
between Buffalo & Jamestown, New York*

TOPICS TO BE DISCUSSED

Understanding the remarriage territory

Transition from divorce to remarriage

Weddings for couples with divorced parents
and for couples planning a second marriage

The emotional stages of stepfamily development

Working together as a couple

Money management in families
complicated by remarriage

PRESENTERS

Margorie Engel, Ph.D., *SAA President*

Jerry Devine, M.A. & Helen Devine, Ph.D.
Marriage and Family Therapists

Gloria Clark, SAA Board & John Clark, Ph.D.
Chapter Leaders

For further information call

1-800-836-ARTS

Web site: www.chautauqua-inst.org

KID'S CORNER

ASK MICHELE

DEAR MICHELE,

This past summer my mom got married to Sam. At first I was really happy about it, but lately I'm not. Sam is always around and now I don't get to spend time just with my Mom the way I used to. What should I do?

Signed, Sara, age 9

DEAR SARA,

It's natural that you miss the time alone you used to have with your Mom. It's a big adjustment getting used to sharing your time with a stepparent. Tell your Mom how you feel and ask her if just you and her can regularly have some time together without your stepfather. She probably misses spending time just with you too, but hasn't wanted your stepfather to feel left out.

KIDS: *If you have questions you'd like Michele to answer, send them to her at:*

Michele Diamond
703 Washington St.
Holliston, MA 01746

Please include your age and first name.

Some Words From the Editor

As promised, the look of our newsletter continues to change. Most obvious is our new logo and paper color. Drop us a line or E-mail to let us know what you think. We are pleased to introduce a new section for children by Michele Diamond, LICSW, BCD. She'll be a regular columnist for a while. I know she would love some feedback and topics you'd like to see addressed.

For those of you who are looking for Barbara Perlmutter's second article, it will be printed in the Summer issue. At deadline time, Barb had the sad task of ministering to her stepmother support group who lost a valued member in the Alaska Airlines crash. Please hold Barb and her group members in your thoughts.

Rick Harper, our columnist for *Step Write Up* will be taking a respite from the newsletter due to health issues. We send him our best wishes for a speedy return.

TO THE RESCUE

By Nancy Vaughn

K

yle straightened up after tying his shoe. "Let's go, Bobby." But Bobby wasn't there. Kyle ran over to a zoo docent. "Have you seen a little boy wearing a blue baseball cap?"

The docent shook his head. "If you've lost him, you better go to the main gate and report it."

"I can't, Kyle said, remembering his stepmother's parting words when she'd dropped them off. "Thanks for watching Bobby for me," she'd said. "I know he can be a pain sometimes, but he really looks up to you."

Kyle raked his hands through his hair as he scanned the groups he passed. Bobby was a pain all right. He was always getting into Kyle's stuff. Just yesterday he'd dropped one of his prized model airplanes.

Kyle slowed down, kicking at a rock. He'd really messed up this time. But Bobby was a handful, she'd said so herself often enough. And if she couldn't handle him, how was he supposed to?

Then he remembered the promise. He'd told his dad he would help make this new family work. Kyle picked up his pace. He had to find Bobby.

Spotting a stuffed monkey in a stroller, he whirled around. Bobby had really liked the gorilla. Kyle was sure he would find him at the gorilla's cage.

But all he spotted were two women. Kyle started to ask for help when one said, "The gorilla's escaped from here before."

The other woman gasped. "How?"

"He used some overgrown bamboo to cross the moat and scale the wall. See how it's been cut back?"

"That must have caused quite a commotion."

Kyle groaned. A gorilla on the loose would be nothing compared to the commotion his stepmother would create.

He ran to the next exhibit. People were tossing coins at the alligators. A coin landed on the head of a sleeping alligator and everyone laughed.

But Kyle wasn't laughing. The short railing made him feel suddenly uneasy. He knew the alligators could move fast. What if Bobby climbed inside to get some of the money?

Kyle shoved the image out of his mind and ran toward the reptile house. Inside, people were chattering excitedly as they stared at the glass-fronted enclosures. He stopped at one of the windows. An enormous boa

constrictor was advancing towards a scurrying mouse. Kyle couldn't watch anymore.

Outside, he dropped to a bench. Never before had the zoo seemed so scary, first the gorilla, then the alligators, and now the boa. All of a sudden he realized he wasn't worried anymore about disappointing his dad or upsetting his stepmother. Bobby could be in danger.

Running to the main gate, he hoped he wasn't too late. A pigeon flew in front of him and he pulled up short. He headed off in the other direction, suddenly knowing where Bobby was.

As he ran, he thought of Bobby's pride and joy, a hand-made scrapbook bulging with bird feathers he'd collected.

Kyle stopped in front of the aviary. "Bobby are you in there?" he called.

"Yeah, come see what I got," Bobby shouted back.

Rushing inside, Kyle saw Bobby climbing down from a tree. "I started following a peacock and I ended up in here," Bobby said. Then he looked at the ground. "I thought you'd be happy if I wasn't hanging around bugging you."

"I've been looking everywhere for you," Kyle said. "I was afraid something had happened to you."

"You were worried about me?" said Bobby, amazed. Then he held out his hand to Kyle. "For you. I can help you make a book too."

Bobby was holding a fistful of feathers. Some were grimy and crushed, but no two were alike. Kyle couldn't believe Bobby was giving them all away.

"Don't you like them?" Bobby asked, his smile fading. "I'm sorry about breaking your jet. I know feathers aren't as cool, but..."

"They're cool," Kyle said, ruffling Bobby's hair. Then he laughed. "They won't break as easy, that's for sure."

On the ride home, Bobby squirmed in his seat. "Can't you drive any faster, Mom?"

"What's your hurry?" she asked.

"Bobby's going to help me start a new hobby," Kyle spoke up.

"And Kyle's going to show me how to fix jets," Bobby added.

Kyle caught his stepmother's wink in the rearview mirror. He smiled and touched the feathers in his pocket. Something else had started to be fixed today, too.

Steps to Stepfamily Success

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

Educate Yourself! Read! Participate in stepfamily workshops and SAA chapter support meetings.

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

Strengthen 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 _____

PHONE # _____

Send Checks to: SAA, 650 J St., Suite 205, Lincoln, NE 68508
Or use your VISA or Mastercard and call 1-800-735-0329.

One Year Membership in SAA = \$40.00 (which includes the book, "Stepfamilies Stepping Ahead")



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