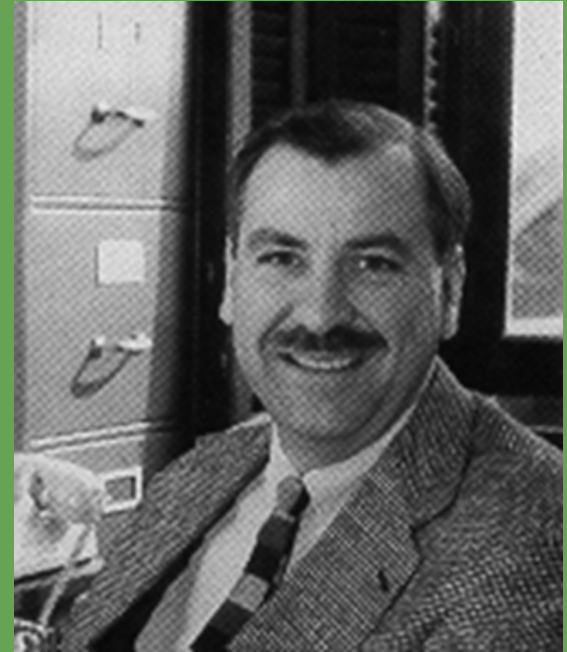




National Stepfamily
Resource Center

PARENTING AND STEPPARENTING



DR. SCOTT BROWNING, PH.D.
PROFESSOR,
DEPARTMENT OF PROFESSIONAL
PSYCHOLOGY
CHESTNUT HILL COLLEGE



THE COORDINATION BETWEEN A PARENT AND STEPPARENT

While the desire to function as unified and equal teammates is understandable, the frequent reality is that the parent is functionally more powerful.

The fact that people don't view others in the same way is good. It is normal.



AIMING TO BE A SUPPORTIVE STEPPARENT

Research that has looked at both positive and negative stepfamily relationships, years after they were formed, has clearly established the preferred relationship is supportive.

It is patently self-defeating to rush into a discipline role.

This does not translate to the stepparent as weak.
Rather, the reserved stepparent is looking to have an honest and respectful relationship.



AN ALTERNATE VERSION OF “PARENTHOOD”

The stepparent will not be a copy of a parent.

The stepparent and stepchild relationship can run a range from deep love and commitment to expressed hatred.

- The majority of stepparent-stepchild relationships fall in a wide middle-ground between the two extremes.



WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

Step-relationships can represent a “perfect storm” of variables:

- close proximity
- “familial bonds”
- jealousy
- uncertain expectations.



MUTUALITY

If the stepparent and stepchild are looking for an equivalent level of closeness and distance, the resulting relationship is stabilized by meeting of mutual expectations.

- If one person greatly desires closeness to the other, and that request is rejected, then the resulting relationship is understandably tense and unsatisfying.



THREE INTERACTING LEVELS

In creating a relationship, one needs to be aware of three levels.

The first is the dynamics between the two people.

The second is the history each brings.

And the third is the systemic pressures created by others in the stepfamily.



ASSESSING RELATIONAL DESIRES

Clinicians will be well-served to assess the relational desires between members of a stepfamily.

This line of questioning will often leave people feeling vulnerable, therefore it is often best to make these inquiries without the stepfamily member in question.



BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS IN STEPFAMILIES

When possible it is advantageous to create an environment whereby people are together in dyads.

To be with another person, and only one other person increases the depth of the relationship.



AFFECTION

What constitutes welcome affection may vary widely from person to person.

The problem with misinterpreted affection is that one takes an action that for all intents and purposes should increase closeness, and ends up causing just the opposite.



HOUSE RULES

The stability derived from clear and reasonable “house rules” allow the stepparent and stepchild to exist in an environment in which there can be greater comfort.

- Increased sense of order
- Decreases triangulation by the stepchild



SUMMARY

Key Concepts in the Creation of a Functional Stepfamily:

- Communication
- Respect
- Understanding each person's role
- Looking to have a mutually satisfying relationship

