



# Making Molehills out of Mountains



Article by  
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Have you ever wondered what sort of family you live in? The number of people who do not recognise that they, their family or friends are part of a stepfamily constantly amazes me.

“Stepfamily” is not a dirty word. It is a type of family that has been around since time immemorial and is becoming increasingly common. If you or your partner have children from a previous relationship then your new family becomes a stepfamily. It sounds simple. In reality, the experience can be far from simple.

Becoming a stepfamily is a complex process. There can be many stresses experienced following major and minor changes at this time of life. Parents who re-partner need to deal with grieving and letting go of past relationships. They also need to discover which expectations are realistic and discard unrealistic or unhealthy expectations. Here are six useful hints to help stepfamilies work:

## 1. Empathetic listening

The development of clear communication is obviously essential however the use of empathic listening is perhaps the most important communication skill step-parents can develop. It is

absolutely essential when dealing with a current partner, an ex-partner and children to put themselves in others' shoes when dealing with them.

## 2. Know your roles

The establishment of roles is crucial to the stepfamily success. When both partners carve out appropriate roles and learn how to manage their barriers are easier to overcome and relationships are stronger.

## 3. Develop a behaviour management plan

Children will often react at various ages. Movement between homes, divided loyalties between families' members and discipline are the major issues that lead to a parent/stepparent standoff. It is helpful if a couple can develop a behaviour management program for their children and stick to it. This helps overcome divided loyalties and minimize resentment from children.

## 4. Look after your partnership

During the demands and turmoil of everyday life a couple's relationship often ends up on the back burner while children's needs receive high priority. Conflict, an essential part of life, can be heightened through a variety of complexities for

stepfamilies. Being pivotal to the success of every family the couple bond is paramount and nurturing this relationship is essential.

## 5. Develop a family mission statement

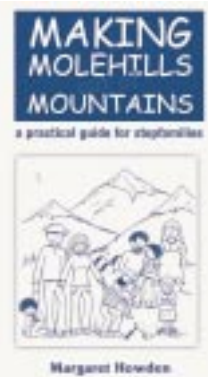
Stepfamilies often go through many stages. Things seem to go wrong just when you think that it is all smooth sailing. The development of a mission statement so the family can strive for common goals and values can be helpful and could be the basis for developing family traditions.

## 6. Stay positive

I remember many years ago hearing Emily and John Visher, American stepfamily gurus, give a talk on typical issues and at the time I felt they were far too positive. Having come out the other end I think it is important to have a positive take on the whole process. It is vital to seek fun and to look for the funny side in situations if stepfamilies are to be successful.

Living in a stepfamily can be complex but developing a greater understanding of how stepfamilies tick is a significant step towards making them work. Also it is amazing how just a few well-chosen strategies can make a molehill out of a mountain!

For more great step-family strategies read *Making Molehills out of Mountains - A practical guide for stepfamilies* by Margaret Howden. It is available for \$25 including postage from the Stepfamily Association of Victoria Inc, PO Box 322, Clifton Hill 3068. Phone 03 9481 1500. Email: [info@stepfamily.org.au](mailto:info@stepfamily.org.au); Website: [www.stepfamily.org.au](http://www.stepfamily.org.au)



# LOVE CHILD A lesson learned



Article by  
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Being a solo parent is a challenge and juggling act. When I chose to become a single parent I was fully committed to creating a positive and nourishing environment for my son. I wanted him to become a confident, loving independent free thinker however this proved to be a challenge that I was not prepared for!

As many sole parents know it is difficult to create a positive environment of love and nourishment for your child if you are still carrying the pain or guilt

of separation. It is easy to overcompensate for the separation by spoiling or pampering your child. Early after my separation I fell for the trap of overcompensation and began to create a spoilt demanding little boy who did not understand the word 'no'. I certainly wasn't raising a loving, confident child.

I learned to build inner confidence in my child by teaching him to find his own unique qualities instead of basing confidence on the results of his

behaviours. True inner confidence and self love is gained by teaching children to appreciate themselves just for being who they are rather than something they have done.

Currently our society tends to encourage adults to value children for the results of their activities. They receive praise or rewards for a goal on the soccer field, straight A's on their exam or a spotless bedroom. I have been guilty of acting like Santa Clause and handed over presents or treats whenever my child had done something 'good'. It is far more effective to help children love themselves for who they are rather than what they have done and don't base acceptance on how they behave or act.

For information on the 5 top ways coaching can help you become a more positive parent, visit [www.victoriामills.com](http://www.victoriामills.com) or call 1800 682 556 for a free trial session.