

LAP Wellness – Combining families

Human Solutions, the new provider for the **Lawyers Assistance Program** offers a variety of health and wellness articles online. The following is an excerpt from *Lifeskills*:

In a combined family, people come from different pasts. Individuals have different histories and start together from different beginnings. Here are some strategies to overcome some of the common difficulties parents experience in combining families:

Discuss the issues

Issues facing the new combined family include where the new family will live, if the new home means a school change for the children, how the children can maintain a good relationship with their absent parent, and how home and work responsibilities will be shared. Talk these matters over in advance, both as a couple and with the children.

Don't try to replace your stepchild's absent biological parent

It is important that the child maintains a strong relationship with the absent parent. Make sure your stepchild understands that you cannot replace her absent mother or father, nor do you wish to. Let them know you are glad she is a part of this new family and that she can count on your care, your love and your support.

A big change for the children

Encourage your respective children to talk about the change in being part of a combined family. Listen to what they have to say. Respect their feelings. Respond to their concerns.

Be fair; be consistent

A stable home life is important for children. Everyone must understand the rules of the household, and make sure they are applied to everyone fairly and consistently. Children are more likely to have a sense of stability and security if the rules are fair and reasonable.

Give it time

It is not realistic to expect children and their step-siblings to bond instantly. Telling them they should get along won't necessarily make it happen. Be patient. Give them time.

Spend time with your biological child

Your own child will now share you with step-siblings. Spending time with your own child on a regular basis will help him realize your relationship will always be strong. Regular one-on-one time will reinforce this bond and contribute to the health of the new combined family.

Your new spouse has needs too

Some parents may feel they should put the needs of their children ahead of those of their spouse. This is not a good idea. Remember this: children in a combined family

need, above all, to feel their biological parent and step-parent together have a strong and secure relationship.