



Australian Government



# Keys

to living together

## INSTANT FAMILIES

BUILDING A STRONGER, HEALTHIER RELATIONSHIP



**Finding  
the time**

***Creating a  
great team***

**Dealing with  
the tough stuff**

PLUS MUCH MORE

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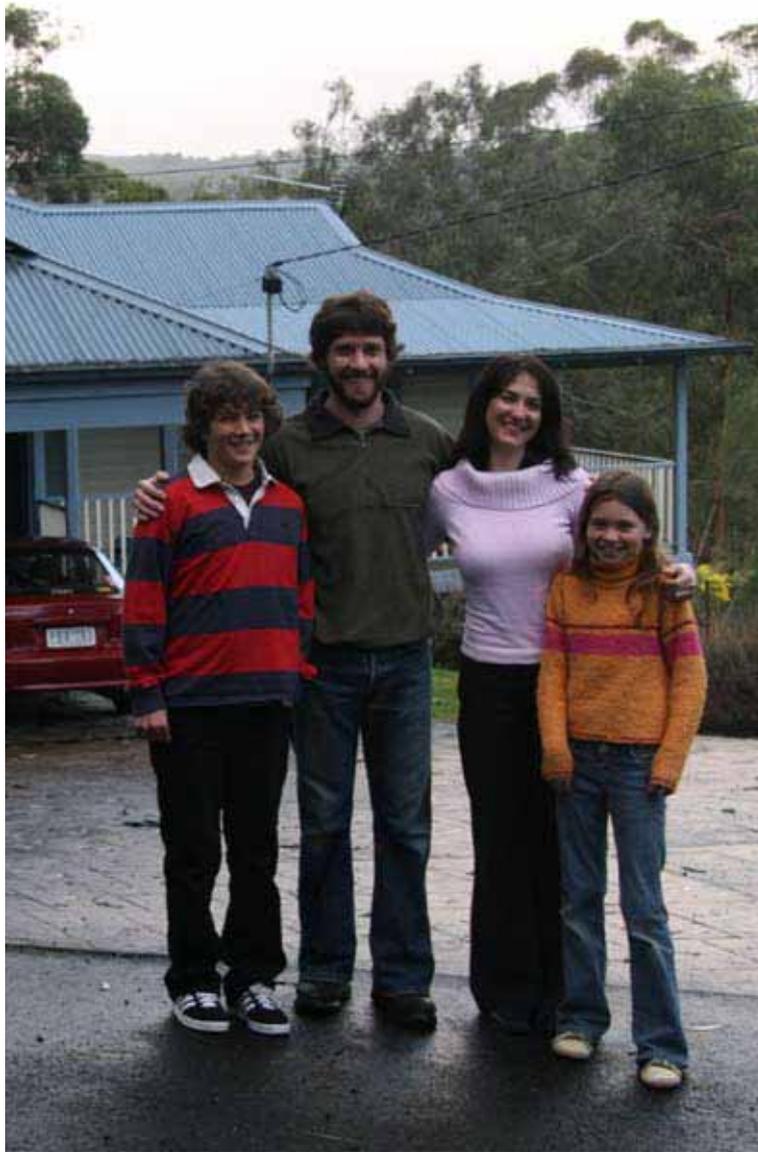
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# Welcome

**Our relationships with the people around us have a significant influence on our wellbeing and how we live. For most of us, at any given time there is one special relationship — with a partner or spouse — that affects our lives more than any other. Despite its importance we often don't think about how this central relationship is working or if it can be improved. We hope this magazine will provide you with useful tips, advice and ideas to enhance your relationships.**

Creating a new relationship and with it a new family is an exciting and important time, that can often also be very complicated. Inside you will find information to help you develop a set of tools to help make the transition a little smoother. There are articles and activities on everything from setting expectations and family priorities, to dealing with conflict and setting house rules.





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## Instant families

**You know the scenario: one day it's one adult and one child, the next day you're repartnered and there are twice as many people in the home, four times as much responsibility and no time at all for each other. What to do?**

"It's essential that you put time away for each other," say Margaret Howden, the founder of the Stepfamily Association of Victoria.

"It is not selfish to have time to yourself," she says. "If you nurture your own relationship and keep it strong, you are doing the best thing for your children. You will be consolidating the structure of your family."

Which is all very well and good, but as you know finding a spare moment to spend time together is as rare as a co-operative teenager.

The key is to prioritise your time together and build it into your week. Fortunately (or not), stepparents get plenty of practice at planning schedules given the competing demands and activities of a blended family, so this shouldn't be too much of a stretch.

All will pay dividends in terms of the intimacy and closeness of your relationship, which as the experts point out, is the foundation stone of your new family.

Don't be concerned that planning will take the spontaneity out of the fun. Rather, it will ensure that it happens.

Make sure the children know that you need time to yourselves and that bar in an emergency, they cannot intrude on that time. "Children respond to boundaries, stepfamilies are no different in that," says Margaret.

Fill in the table on the next page with all of your regular commitments. Make sure that you include the time you will spend together. Once complete put it somewhere everyone can see it like on the fridge door. This way the whole family will be clear about when you should be left in peace.

### TIPS

- Make a list of the regular things you have to do during the week that can't be changed, for example sporting commitments or committee meetings.
- Now look at where you can find some time for each other. You don't need hours a day, research indicates that even 20 minutes a day will make a difference and give a couple time to connect.
- Make an agreement to organise a date at least once a month. You don't have to go out, just do something special. Also, try to organise a night alone occasionally.
- Use the plan on the next page to map your agreements.

# Plan for finding the time

	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT	SUN
morning							
afternoon							
night							

Every \_\_\_\_\_ of the month is to be kept free for our date.

Time for Relationships



Time for Relationships



Time for Relationships

## Setting expectations

**The formation of a new family is an exciting time, but it can also be a time of tension, especially when children are involved. Being clear about what is expected in the new environment can help to ease the tension.**

Couples that know what is important to each other and their family, and have talked about how their lives

will work together, are well on their way to creating a healthy and happy environment for their family.

Not sure where to start? The key is asking lots of questions, of yourself and of each other. Below are a few questions to get you started. Get a piece of paper and number it 1–17. Now write down your answers (don't show each other).

- 1 Who will handle the finances?
- 2 Will you share all of the money or keep your assets separate?
- 3 How will you share the income?
- 4 What are your financial goals as individuals? And as a family?
- 5 Do you want to have more children together?
- 6 If so when would you like to have children?
- 7 How many children would you like to have?
- 8 Does one or both of you have children from previous relationships? If so who will discipline the children?
- 9 How do you expect the children will react to their new family? How will you manage that reaction?
- 10 How will you ensure that the children feel involved in their new family?
- 11 What kind of relationship does each of you have with your ex-partners? What impact, if any, will this have on your relationship?
- 12 What cultural and religious expectations do you have for your partner and your family?
- 13 Will you get married?
- 14 Where will you live? Your place, their place or somewhere else?
- 15 What role will your partner's and your children's extended families play in your new family?
- 16 What do you expect from your partner in terms of loyalty, respect and being faithful?
- 17 Are there any other issues that you would like to discuss? List these.

Time for Relationships



Time for Relationships

Now compare answers. Any surprises? Talk about it. Still not sure you have covered everything? There are a number of quizzes and activities throughout this magazine that will help you think about many of these areas in more detail. If you have questions or concerns about your relationship that you are not

comfortable talking about with your partner, it is important not to ignore them. Talk them through with someone you trust and if something more serious is on your mind like control, violence or trust issues, get help from a professional counsellor. It is important that your relationship is healthy for both of you right from the start.

## Family priorities

You may also find it useful to get together and develop a list of priorities for your short, medium and long-term goals. Be realistic about what you can achieve and also consider what you will be willing to sacrifice in order to achieve it.

Short term 1 year	Medium term 5 years	Long term 10 years
Goal: <i>Buy a bigger car</i>	Goal: <i>Move to a bigger house</i>	Goal: <i>Financial security</i>
Goal:	Goal:	Goal:
Goal:	Goal:	Goal:
Goal:	Goal:	Goal:

In order to help you achieve these goals you may find it useful to develop a budget. For help doing this try the budget planner under 'Talking about the Difficult Stuff'.



## Who does what?

**Working out who does what in your new family can be a tricky business. Everyone has their own way of doing things but it is important for the new family to develop its own unique way of managing the household duties. Agreeing on how you will share the workload early can save problems down the track.**

How? Talk about it. The trick is to work out what you like, don't like, will do, won't do, and be prepared to listen to everyone's point of view, and come to some kind of middle ground. Need a little help to get the ball rolling? Try this quick activity.

Here is a list of some common household tasks. Pick five that you would prefer to do (don't tell each other). If your children are old enough you may like to involve them in this activity.

- Vacuuming
- Washing dishes
- Car maintenance
- Mowing lawn
- Take rubbish out
- Clean toilet

- Cook dinner
- Do laundry
- Pay the bills
- Organise a dinner party or BBQ

Now compare what you each chose. Which tasks haven't been selected?

If you've got the same task, decide who's going to give or take. Don't forget about the tasks that haven't been selected. Sharing is allowed!

Now that you have an idea of what you all like, and perhaps more

importantly don't like to do, it might be helpful to create a weekly housework plan. If you discovered you all dislike the same things, try alternating the plan each week. The first line gives an example of how the plan works.

Whether you decide to implement a plan, or choose to manage the workload without one, it pays to remember that if one person feels they are doing too much, they probably won't be very happy... and this can create tension in your family. Don't forget to share — it's more fun that way.



“  
**Which tasks haven't been selected?**  
”

# Sorting out who does what

TASK	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT	SUN
Washing up	Jack	John	Eally	Ben	John	John	John

Working Together



Working Together



Working Together

## Dealing with conflict

**Disagreements are a normal part of any healthy relationship and don't have to be detrimental to it. In fact, if one of you continually gives in, just to keep the peace, it can be much worse. The key is to respect each other, and not to let your emotions take over.**

Chances are when you disagree you will feel very passionately, your emotions are heightened and you may get angry, frustrated or hurt. This is fine, so long as you are able to express your feelings without being destructive. This is not always easy.

When we are really angry or upset, physical and emotional tension builds up and can cloud our judgement. This can make it impossible to get your point across in a rational manner. Listen to your body and recognise your warning signs. If you are starting to raise your voice, your palms are getting sweaty or your pulse is racing it may be a good idea to take a break and agree to have the discussion later. Before you attempt to tackle the topic again together, ask yourself the following questions:

### 1 What am I feeling?

Are you feeling angry, hurt, embarrassed, jealous, disappointed or betrayed?

### 2 Why am I feeling this?

Identify exactly what has made you feel this way. Is there anything from the past that could be adding to the way you feel?

### 3 What do I want to change?

Know what it is that you want to work on. What needs to be resolved from the past or present? What action will you take?

### 4 Who am I really angry at?

Is the problem really your partner's doing? Are you partly responsible? It is to do with someone, or something else?

### 5 Is my reaction warranted?

Is your reaction suitable for the issue at hand? Consider the possibility that you could be overreacting or under reacting.



This can also be a worthwhile activity if you are thinking of raising something that could cause conflict.

It is a good idea to work out a set of rules that you both agree on for when you disagree. Here are a few ideas:

- **Pick the right time** — Pick a time when you can both give your full concentration. Avoid times when either of you are tired or stressed. Make sure there are no distractions; turn off the TV and take the phone off the hook.
- **Attack the problem** — Keep your discussion focused on the problem, try not to attack each other personally.
- **Stay focused** — Stick to the present, and stay focused on the problem at hand. Don't rehash past mistakes that can't be changed and don't try to tackle every other problem. Address other problems at another time.
- **Reach a conclusion** — Decide on what action to take. You will probably need to compromise, remember you can't win all of the time.

## Develop your own set of rules

### Rules for dealing with conflict

1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	
Agreed:	Agreed:



Working Together

## The art of compromise

**It is crucial for your future as a new family to work out exactly what your needs and wants are, and how you will operate as a family.**

It is more common than you might think for someone to love their new partner but not see eye to eye on how they should live.

What must be remembered is that, with few exceptions, no one individual's way of living is wrong, it is merely different to how you have chosen to live.

According to the Stepfamily Association of Victoria, it is a mistake to think that your way of living is necessarily right and will work for the new family; it won't automatically.

"The biggest challenges for new families in their early stages are how to respect the past and what values to maintain when creating a shared life," says the Association's Margaret Howden.

Good communication is the basis of every relationship but especially so for those involved in re-partnering and new families, given the complexity of the situation.

Margaret's advice is to talk, keep talking, and learning. But, she warns, compromise is a fact of life. The key to harmony is deciding what is and isn't negotiable and then explaining why that is so.

“  
**The moulding of a new family takes time, especially where children are involved**  
”

It is also important that each member of the family feels that his or her opinion and needs are being acknowledged as the structure and the day-to-day working life of the family is being nussed out. This applies to children as well as adults.

Margaret's suggestion is for on-going family meetings where all

members get to have a say.

"Family meetings are a great way to establish a sense of belonging and way of learning more about each other," says Margaret.

It pays to be aware that the moulding of a new family takes time, especially where children are involved.

For children, a new family can involve strong and confusing feelings. There is often a deep ambivalence and a fresh wave of grief that their family is truly in the past. But with love, support and a lot of talking new families can look forward to a bright future.



# Family meeting plan

The \_\_\_\_\_ family meeting will be held every \_\_\_\_\_  
 from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ in the \_\_\_\_\_.

Remember to pick a time that everyone can attend and a place that is free of any distractions; turn off the TV, mobile phones and take the phone off the hook. Try to keep the meeting a reasonable length no longer than 30 minutes, shorter if possible.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Chairperson \_\_\_\_\_

Remember that every member of the family that is school age or older should get a turn at being the chairperson.

### Agenda

This list will be placed on the fridge and members of the family should add agenda items throughout the week. Agenda items can include good things that have happened during the week, things the family want to achieve or things that are bothering them.

Agenda item	Action	Result

For tips on how to use the plan see the following page.



Working Together

### USING THE FAMILY MEETING PLAN

- Step One: The issue will be clearly defined by our family.
- Step Two: Our family will brainstorm ideas to solve the problem.
- Step Three: Our family will attempt to decide unanimously on the best solution. If a decision cannot be made, we will take a vote.
- Step Four: We will record the agreed action on our family meeting plan.
- Step Five: We will review next week and record the result on the Family meeting plan.

### FAMILY MEETING RULES

*Additional rules can be developed by your family in your first meeting.*

- Rule One: Every family member will be treated with respect.
- Rule Two: Every family member will be allowed to speak uninterrupted.
- Rule Three:
- Rule Four:

Working Together



Working Together



## The company of strangers

**It can be a weird feeling finding yourself engulfed in a large family brought together by two people.**

Families are supposed to know each other right? They are supposed to know where people fit into the scheme of things, but like so much else with stepfamilies it doesn't always work out that way.

It takes getting used to, which is why research

figures suggest that it can take from 18 months to five years for a stepfamily to "shake down" into a new unit... and sometimes even longer to learn the names of all the people who are now regarded as family!

Stepfamilies give new meaning to the phrase extended family. But being part of an extended family does not need to overextend your patience or goodwill,

“  
**A much-loved grandmother can provide an oasis of stability...**  
”



## External Influences



although it may exhaust your supply of chairs at parties. More can be merrier and can lead to a richer life but again it all comes down to attitude, communication and a bit of luck.

Biological parents need to give careful consideration to the role that extended family members, in particular those that have been close to the children, will play in the new order.

It is worth remembering that a much loved grandmother can provide an

oasis of stability when everything else is changing for a child. And that a committed grandfather can be a wonderful role model for a boy that does not have daily contact with his own family.

It is also important to note that children will make their own decisions as to whom they like and dislike. Members of the family should respect and acknowledge this.

### THINGS YOU CAN DO

- Allow your family time to get to know each other.
- Organise events to help the new extended family get to know each other.
- Look upon the new member of your extended family as a resource.
- Allow your children to continue their relationships with extended family from previous relationships.
- Respect and acknowledge that your children can and will make their own decisions as to whom they like and dislike.





## Decision time

### A new family coming together faces many adjustments, not least in terms of parenting.

Parenting children who aren't your own is fraught with problems. It is a tread-warily scenario. The consensus among relationship educators is that the "new" parent who seeks to mark out new territory different to the biological parent is more likely to have a successful relationship with the children.

Further complicating matters is that you, the new partners, will invariably have different views on parenting, discipline and children's roles and responsibilities within a family.

The first thing to be done for new partners is to talk about those differences. You need to give time and thought to what your values and expectations are about raising children. But do this away from the children and then present a united front.

"The family will be more harmonious if adults agree on what is acceptable and

what is not," says Relationship Educator Margaret Howden. "All children are more secure with boundaries. It is, therefore, important to set limits and be clear about what is to be done if boundaries are overstepped," says Margaret, who wrote the book *Making Molehills out of Mountains*

– a practical guide for stepfamilies. "Clear boundaries reduce the likelihood of children manipulating households."

Experience shows that it is usually better for the biological parent to take the lead with discipline.

This is fine and manageable until that moment when all hell breaks loose and only the stepparent is around.

This is inevitable so you need to be prepared and have communicated clearly to the children that the stepparent has authority in these situations, advises Margaret.

As always, communication is the key to parenting in stepfamilies — communication between the partners and then to the children.

“  
**You need to give time and thought to what your values and expectations are...**  
”



## Developing house rules

A good set of house rules can help the household run more smoothly. Try this activity alone as a couple first. Once you have come to an agreement on what will be acceptable and what won't be tolerated you can redo the activity as a family. By asking the children they will feel involved, and will have of ownership over the rules, making it more likely that they will stick to them.

Make a copy of this plan for each person taking part in the activity.

What our family won't tolerate	Consequence

- Step 1** Fill out this plan on your own
- Step 2** Compare the lists
- Step 3** Make a new list, include anything that is the same on all both lists.
- Step 4** Discuss anything that is left of each of the original lists. Decide on what will be added to the common list and what will be left off.



**TIP**

- If you decide to do this activity as a family, make sure that your and your family are clear on where you stand and back each other up.



Talking about the Difficult Stuff

## The bottom line

**Yours, mine or ours? And then what percentage of yours is mine or ours? The permutations are endless, as is the potential for money problems in a stepfamily.**

The key to money management is to work together, not letting it pull you apart.

There is no sure-fire way of deciding how you are going to organise your finances. You have to work out what is right for you in the context of your new circumstances.

"It is an individual decision, both for the new family and for the two partners within it," says Margaret Howden of Stepfamily Association of Victoria.

"New partners need to be aware of the impact of what has gone before", she says. "Everyone brings their history of money, be it good or bad, with them

to the relationship. And that has to be acknowledged and respected."

It is important for your new relationship that you are open about how you feel about money.

A lot of new partners are still raw about what a divorce has cost them financially. Those feelings should be acknowledged and talked about.

And be aware that your feelings will change as circumstances change. In the first flush of a new relationship you might want to pool your resources only later to decide that is not the way you want to live. Which is fine. But talk about it. Don't let it build a wall between the two of you. Problems lose some of their heat and potential for pain when discussed openly.

Make sure that you and your partner take the time to work through the following checklist as early as possible.





- Do you have any debts that your partner is unaware of? Being responsible for your partner inheriting financial problems that they are unaware of can start things off on the wrong foot.
- Take stock of what money and assets you have as an individual. It is important to decide how much (if any) will become 'mutual funds and assets'.
- Decide if you want to pool resources or keep separate accounts and then make sure you are both happy with this decision.
- Take time to talk over short term, medium and long term goals and put together a budget.
- Make sure you both have a legal Will.
- Decide what expenses you want to share and those you will manage separately. If you or your children have personal interests, decide who will pay for them?
- Be aware that you are liable for debts if you sign guarantees as co-borrower or guarantor.
- Take time, at least once, to see a financial expert together to talk about insurance, superannuation and investments.



## Preparing a budget

**Regardless of how you decide to manage your finances, chances are your new family will have some financial goals. You might want to go on a family holiday, buy a house, get married, or have more children. All of these things cost money and while budgeting might not seem very romantic it can certainly help you achieve your goals faster.**

When you consider that financial problems are one of the greatest causes for relationship failure, getting your finances in order early makes a lot of sense. Use the budget planner on the coming pages to help you work out how much you earn and what you spend it on.

Set some time aside to look at the budget planner together. Start by writing down all of your income and all of your expenses. You'll need to decide whether your budget will be a weekly, fortnightly or monthly guide. Some people like to match their budget to their pay period. Once you come to a decision, make sure all the numbers you write down are for the same period.

When you've worked out your combined income and expenses, you'll be able to see how much regular income you get and where that money goes over your chosen time period. Take away your total expenses from your total income to get your result.

TOTAL INCOME	-	TOTAL EXPENSES	=	?
<b>\$</b>		<b>\$</b>		<b>\$</b>

Your result will show whether you're spending more than you earn or if you have money left after your expenses to use for other things.



### What do we do with our budget?

Is the result what you were expecting? If you're spending all of your income (or even more), your budget can show the areas where you might be able to change your spending habits. If you need to make a change you might like to sort your expenses into two groups: essentials and extras. Remember you both need to be happy with this budget, so make sure you can both live with the changes, there is no point having a budget that you won't stick to. If you have money left over, think about how that money could be used. Getting debt under control is

important. Set some goals together, and then work out how your budget will help you reach them.

If you decide to keep your finances totally separate you may like to have separate budgets too. Just remember you will still need to make some decisions on who will pay for what and how you will use your budgets to reach your common goals.

If you would like some more help The Australian Government Financial Literacy Foundation website [www.understandingmoney.gov.au](http://www.understandingmoney.gov.au) has lots of great tips on ways to manage your money.

## Income

Work out your regular income.

Type of income	Amount received each period
Salary or wage (after tax)	\$ .....
Pension or Government allowance	\$ .....
Child support or other payments	\$ .....
Regular interest from savings	\$ .....
Regular income from investments (such as rent from an investment property, distributions from a managed fund, or dividends from shares)	\$ .....
Other	\$ .....
<b>Total income</b>	<b>\$ .....</b>

Talking about  
the Difficult Stuff



## Expenses

Work out your regular expenses. Remember to use the same time frame that you chose for your income. Next, add up the subtotals to get your total expenses.

Household expenses		Education expenses	
Rent	\$ .....	School fees	\$ .....
Repairs	\$ .....	University or TAFE fees	\$ .....
Gas	\$ .....	Tuition	\$ .....
Electricity	\$ .....	Books and uniforms	\$ .....
Water	\$ .....	Camps/excursions	\$ .....
Telephone/mobile	\$ .....	<b>Sub total</b>	<b>\$ .....</b>
Rates	\$ .....	Debt repayments	
Body corporate fees	\$ .....	Mortgage	\$ .....
Internet	\$ .....	Car loan	\$ .....
Cable/TV	\$ .....	HECS or HELP payments	\$ .....
Furniture	\$ .....	Credit cards	\$ .....
Appliances	\$ .....	Personal loans	\$ .....
Groceries	\$ .....	Store cards	\$ .....
Gardening	\$ .....	Lay-bys	\$ .....
<b>Sub total</b>	<b>\$ .....</b>	<b>Sub total</b>	<b>\$ .....</b>

If you would like some more help the Australian Government Financial Literacy Foundation website [www.understandingmoney.gov.au](http://www.understandingmoney.gov.au)

has lots of great tips on ways to manage your money.



Transport expenses		Savings	
Car registration	\$ .....	Superannuation contrib.	\$ .....
Parking	\$ .....	Regular savings	\$ .....
Fuel	\$ .....	Regular investments	\$ .....
Repairs/maintenance	\$ .....	<b>Sub total</b>	\$ .....
Public transport	\$ .....	Other expenses	
<b>Sub total</b>	\$ .....	Child care	\$ .....
Medical expenses		Child support payments	\$ .....
Doctor	\$ .....	Gifts	\$ .....
Medicines	\$ .....	Donations	\$ .....
Dentist	\$ .....	Hobbies and sports	\$ .....
<b>Sub total</b>	\$ .....	Subscriptions	\$ .....
Insurance		Newspapers & magazines	\$ .....
Home and contents	\$ .....	Movies & DVDs	\$ .....
Car	\$ .....	Restaurants & takeaway	\$ .....
Health	\$ .....	Alcohol & cigarettes	\$ .....
Income protection	\$ .....	Pet food	\$ .....
Life	\$ .....	Other pet costs	\$ .....
<b>Sub total</b>	\$ .....	.....	\$ .....
		.....	\$ .....
		.....	\$ .....
		.....	\$ .....
		<b>Sub total</b>	\$ .....
		Total expenses	
			\$ .....

Talking about the Difficult Stuff



## Hardest call of all

**There can be no subject more difficult to talk about than infidelity. Most people would like to simply ignore it. It's hard to imagine that it could happen to you, yet the statistics speak for themselves.**

Denise Lacey, Manager of the Marriage and Relationship Education Unit at Centacare Melbourne, says talking about infidelity, and the possibility it could occur, could prevent it.

"Couples need to consider that it can happen to them. But they also need to know that open communication could prevent a potentially disastrous situation," says Denise.

Denise suggests telling your partner if you are attracted to someone or uncomfortable with the way a situation is developing. Difficult to do but better than the alternative, she says.

Take for instance, Brad who found himself in a situation with a work

colleague. Recently the office banter had taken on a new meaning. It was flattering but instinctively Brad knew he was in dangerous territory.

In this kind of a situation, advises Denise, Brad should avoid any extra contact with his colleague and he should talk about what was happening with his partner. It could be the discussion that saves his relationship.

Infidelity, says Denise, is not simply restricted to the physical. Partners should be aware when they are overstepping the boundaries when it comes to sharing intimacies of their primary relationship.

"You have to watch out for the risk factors, be aware of them and talk about them. Don't let the poison of infidelity get into the system. Talking about the possibility of infidelity can be awkward but it is better than losing your family."

“  
**Infidelity is not  
restricted to  
the physical...**  
”

### TIPS

- Be aware infidelity could happen to you.
- If you are attracted to someone or if you find yourself in an uncomfortable situation, talk to your partner about it.
- Avoid any extra contact with the person concerned.
- Don't share intimate details of your relationship with other people.



Talking about  
the Difficult Stuff



Crisis? What Crisis?

## Dealing with the unexpected — a different style

**Dealing with a crisis can be stressful on any relationship, regardless of how close you are or how long you have been together. However, when you decide to share your life with someone you are also making a decision to share not only the good times but also the harder ones.**

Events such as an illness in the family, death of a close friend, or unexpected unemployment can present complex challenges to couples. These challenges may seem insurmountable, but in actual fact can strengthen your relationship.

The important thing to remember is that you will both have your own

way of dealing with the situation. You shouldn't expect your partner to react in the same way. In fact according to Andrew King from the Sydney-based Uniting Care Burnside, men and women tend to handle problems differently. "Guys are less practiced at talking about their feelings", says Andrew. "But it doesn't mean they love or trust their partner less because they won't talk about their problems."

This will mean that you will need to understand each other. It is important for both of you to recognise how you are feeling. No matter how you deal with things, ignoring your feelings will not make them go away.

Men tend to take a more solutions based approach to problems, so it may be useful to work out together what can be done or how you can help. While women like to talk things through, if this is difficult for you, being willing to listen is a great start. Remember to be gentle with each other, sometimes just knowing you have someone around to give you support, can make all the difference. However if you don't feel like you or your partner is coping, get support. Friends, relatives, counsellors, and doctors can all be a big help in these times.



### TIPS

- Understand that men and women handle problems differently.
- Recognise your feelings, ignoring them won't make them go away.
- If you want to find a solution, work out what can be done in a practical sense.
- If talking about the issue is hard for you, offer to listen.
- Get help from friends, relatives, counsellors or doctors if needed.



## Help is on the way

**It can seem at times that stepfamilies lurch from crisis to crisis with little relief.**

Those with adolescent children know this situation well. They get over one situation when another more challenging one arises.

But don't despair. The fact is conflict is an inevitable part of life and cannot be totally avoided. In some instances, problems may not be resolved despite best efforts.

Stepparents can be overly sensitive about conflict, fearing it will lead them down a familiar and painful path.

Conflict need not be destructive, says Margaret Howden of the Stepfamily Association of Victoria. It can be positive if it leads to communication and better understanding in the relationship.

Take, for instance, a 14-year-old who wants his parents back together. Nothing will convince him otherwise, not even the fact that both his parents are happily re-partnered. The best his parents can do is acknowledge his feelings and make sure he knows how much they love him, while continuing

to nurture their new relationships. But those families who feel they are struggling too hard with little results should remember that there is specialised help available in the community for stepfamilies that are having difficulties.

It is important to acknowledge that seeking guidance through rough patches is not an admission that your new family is not working. Getting help when you need it is smart thinking.

The adage that a problem shared is a problem halved really does apply.

There are a range of support services available for stepfamilies. The Stepfamily Association has a wide range of services including phone counselling. Schools are another good place to look for guidance as they often have counsellors available.

The Internet is another source of information but it is important to ensure that the information you are accessing is from a reputable source (for example, a government agency or relationship educator).

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# Notes



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## Other books in this series



Going from a couple to a family with a child is one of the most exciting and important times in your relationship. It is impossible to ignore the fact that your lives are about to be transformed forever. *Keys to Living Together — Then we were three* includes information to help you develop a set of tools to deal with the changes in your relationship.



Taking the first step and making a significant commitment to someone you love is one of the most exciting and important times in your relationship. *Keys to Living Together — Taking the first step* includes the information you need to develop your own set of relationship tools.

### Other resources in the series

Can't find a *Keys to Living Together* kit that is right for you? We are currently developing kits for more family types and families with other needs.

To find out about these other kits you can check out our website [www.facsia.gov.au/keys](http://www.facsia.gov.au/keys).

## CONTACTS

- **Family Relationship Advice Line**  
1800 050 321 8am–8pm Monday to Friday  
10am–4pm Saturday (not including national public holidays)

- **Family Relationships Online**  
[www.familyrelationships.gov.au](http://www.familyrelationships.gov.au)

Family Relationships Online can assist people from families affected by relationship or separation issues.

- **Raising Children Network: the Australian parenting website**  
[www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au)

- **Family Relationship Services Program**  
[www.facsia.gov.au/frsp](http://www.facsia.gov.au/frsp)  
Includes a directory of organisations providing family relationship support services.

- **Financial Literacy Foundation**  
[www.understandingmoney.gov.au](http://www.understandingmoney.gov.au)

- **Stepfamily Association of Victoria Inc**  
03 9481 1500 9am–5pm Monday to Friday  
[www.stepfamily.org.au](http://www.stepfamily.org.au)

- **National Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Helpline**  
1800 200 526

### FOR ADDITIONAL COPIES OR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

**Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs**

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(\*free unless calling from a mobile or pay phone)

TTY: 1800 260 402

(a telephone typewriter for people with a hearing or speech impairment)

[www.facsia.gov.au/keys](http://www.facsia.gov.au/keys)