

10 RADICAL STEPMOM PRINCIPLES FOR A HAPPIER YOU



1. It's okay to feel your feelings.

Whatever you're feeling, own it. Don't guilt yourself or shame yourself. You're not a bad person or crazy. Stepmotherhood is complex and elicits emotions we may be unfamiliar with, like jealousy or resentment. We also can feel over-the-moon-happy while also carrying sadness and grief. Remember: Feelings are just visitors. Guilt and shame doesn't create the space for processing and growth, so give yourself permission to feel whatever is on your heart.

2. Your relationship takes priority.

This is a controversial concept for many; I get it. Of course the kids are a priority, but I see way too many stepmom's lose their partners when trying to find their parental role. Happier stepmoms are those who stay connected to the whole reason you're a stepmom...the person you fell in love with. We are better parents when we're connected as partners. Pro tip: Your relationship also comes before the ex. Sure, the mother of the kids have to be considered in many scenarios; however, you and your partner are a unit, a team, and your lives together can't progress and thrive if you're constantly tending to the past relationship.

3. YOU get to define your role.

When you think about what it means to be a stepmom, what comes to mind? Is it the Disney portrayal of an evil woman who treats her stepdaughter like a servant? Is it taking on all mother-like responsibilities because that's what she "should" do? There is a societal stigma and pressure on the role of a stepmom. Not to mention a million double-standards. We should love our stepkids, but not too much because they have a mother. We should be involved and do all the mom-like things, but "know our place" when the "real mom" is around. Here's my thoughts: stop *shoulding* on yourself. It's too messy.

Only YOU get to define your role based on your comfort levels, expectations, hopes and dreams for your life and family. You were your own fully functioning person before meeting your partner, so keep her alive and safe as you figure out how you want to show up in this role. Everyone's opinions of what your role should be (including your partner's) should be taken lightly; they aren't living your life. Attempting to take on what isn't meant for you is destined to lead to confusion and resentment.

If you haven't already, I strongly encourage you to have a discussion with your partner about expectations. If you need some guidance on how to navigate the conversation, [CLICK HERE](#).

4. You don't need a permission slip to participate in your own life.

Have you been told to "stay in your own lane" yet? Have you had to decide whether or not you were going to come to pick-up, or a birthday party? As stepmoms, we often bear the weight of our mere presence causing tension and conflict. We are put in the position of feeling like we need to make ourselves invisible so we can "keep the peace". Choosing to consider the other home's feelings, and consider their own journey into blended family life is absolutely important. However, what does this mean long-term? You are not responsible for how the other home receives your existence. If you want to go to the Christmas event at the school - go. If your partner can't do the drop-off, and you're open to it - do it. You don't need to tip-toe around someone's feelings of you. You don't need a permission slip to participate in your own life.

5. MOM is a VERB

A child does not need to exit your body for you to be a mom. Being a mom isn't just who you ARE....it's what you DO. If you're wiping noses, making meals, reading books, giving your time and love... you're in it, girl. Welcome to the club. The other house might be all in their feelings about how you are showing up for the kid(s), and that's fine. Chalk it up to an instinctual "mama bear" response, or maybe they're just having a hard time accepting another (awesome) woman in their kids' lives. Whatever it is - don't let the dismissive, minimizing and blatant rude comments get to you. With that said, if being called "mom" or being in that motherly role isn't within your comfort level—that's also fine. Refer back to #3.

6. It's okay if you don't love your stepkid(s) and it's okay if you do.

Did you know that it's common for moms to feel disconnected to their newborn, even weeks or months after birth? Do you believe in love at first sight? Did you love your partner right away, or did it take time? My point: loving someone is not immediate nor is it guaranteed. It's an outrageous expectation to think stepmoms are just going to love their stepkid(s) "like their own". Feeling like we are somehow failing because we don't feel this love can be harmful to your own happiness, and the relationship with your stepkid(s). Focus your energy on connection and bonding and let things happen organically. If you fall in love with your stepkid, that's fantastic! Regardless of feeling those loving feelings, you are still a good stepmom.

7. Normalize communicating your experience to your partner.

Unless your partner is also a stepmom, they have no clue what it's like to walk in your shoes. They won't know what it's like to feel left out or the anxiety that accompanies transition day. If you want support from your partner, you'll have to find an effective way of communicating what this journey is like for you. Additionally, learn about their experience and how they feel in your blended family. The more you can normalize discussing your experience, the more connected and compassionate you'll be in managing the blended family issues that come your way.

8. You are under no obligation to have a relationship with the ex.

Sure, there are some families who can attend events together, wear matching shirts and live in co-parenting harmony. Yay for them! However, this is not the reality for many blended families, and going in with this expectation can lead to massive disappointment and heartache. What type of relationship do you want with the ex-wife? Do you want to have monthly coffee dates to discuss the kids? Or are you more comfortable with a cordial businesslike dynamic? Somewhere in the middle? Identify your comfort level and boundaries and share them with your partner. How you choose to interact with the ex-wife will impact the way you parent with your spouse. It's best to be transparent and open. Pro tip: Your comfort level may be different than that of the ex-wife. The goal is to be flexible, but not at the sacrifice of your own boundaries.

9. Grieve the life you don't have.

You can love your life, but still grieve the life you don't have. Each choice we make changes the trajectory of our lives; it's both terrifying and empowering. You chose to share your life with a partner who has kids, and that dynamic may have deeply impacted the life you thought you would have. The life without an ex that's forever present. The life where you're experiencing firsts with your partner. It's healthy to process these feelings for what they are: grief. Afterall, grief is just love. It's love we were never able to give or receive, and we have to find somewhere to put it.

10. You are so much more than a stepmom.

The woman you were before this role... she needs you too. You did not spend years creating and falling in love with the woman you are to watch her get swallowed up by the complexities of stepmotherhood. When you're trying to establish where you fit into your blended family, you have to continue to nurture the goals, dreams, hobbies and qualities that make you, YOU. Neglecting yourself can lead to all sorts of negative emotions.

Welcome stepmotherhood as part of your identity, but remember it's not all of you. You are strong. You are valued. You matter.

Be Well & Stay Radical,



RADICAL STEPMOMS PODCAST
mom is a verb