TIPS FOR

NEW STEP-PARENTS

By Renee Mill

FAKE IT TILL YOU MAKE IT

It is common not to love your stepchild immediately, but be kind and work on developing a relationship over time. Do it because you love your partner. Do it because every child needs love and it is the right thing to do. Talk to your stepchild, be interested in their day, their feelings and their life.

MANAGE YOUR EXPECTATIONS

The younger the child, the sooner you will form a bond. It will take two years for a two-year-old child to accept you. It will take 10 years for a 10-year-old to do the same.

SET BOUNDARIES

Do not take on too much. You are not Mary Poppins or the family's saviour. Do what is reasonable and possible for you to cope with.

BE AN ADULT

Do not see your stepchild as competing for time with your partner. Be understanding and facilitate opportunities for your partner and their child to be together.

ALLOW FOR COUPLE TIME

At the same time, make sure there is alone time for the relationship so it can flourish. Do not allow the children to squeeze all of the time out of the relationship.

DO NOT ADOPT ROLE OF BIOLOGICAL PARENT

Reassure the child, "I know I am not your parent and I will never try and replace your mother (or father). I want to be a good friend."

DO NOT DISCIPLINE

Let the biological parent do it. However, if necessary, the biological parent can say, for example, "I am going out now and Sarah is in charge. If she asks you to do something, I expect you to listen."

PLAN YOUR PARENTING

Have regular meetings with your partner to discuss the needs of all the children and the relationship. Agree on how things should be done. Biological parents need to appreciate what the step-parent is doing and respect their wishes.

RIDOFRANZ—GETTY IMAGES