

## Be Center or Be Centered

**The greatest attributes about women make it hard for them in families, particularly stepfamily life.** The way we think about our role as the stepmother and family member can greatly affect our happiness and satisfaction with our life. Being aware of them can make all the difference – no matter what kind of family you are in. Shift your thinking on these ideas, and make your life better.

**Women are raised in our society to be the center of the family.** And the struggle of the stepmother begins. To most women, this means taking her rightful place as the creator of a loving home and beautiful family, and partnering with her husband to make the home run smoothly. The problem with this role expectation (by both the father and the stepmother) is that it “sucks the stepmother into a quagmire of domestic roles; it’s not only that somebody makes her do it, she also does it to herself,” explains Betty Carter, coauthor of *The Invisible Web: Gender Patterns in Family Relationships*. Trying to follow the traditional roles of man and woman in the biological family barely work, it doesn’t work at all in the stepfamily.

**How can you avoid this “I’m supposed to be the center of the family” quagmire? Change your expectations of your role in the stepfamily.** Instead of seeing yourself as the center of the family, make the shift to just being happy to be a part of it and know that your role will develop over time. Your husband will need to change his expectation of your role as well. You can’t be “instant Mom” to his children, and you need his help to gradually find your place. If you are in a situation where you are taking care of your husband’s children on a full time basis without him, you’ll have additional issues to work out. (We’ll be talking about those in the future.)

**Women have a deep and loving desire for their families to be happy.** Why? Women have a natural instinct and intuitive nature regarding relationships. Terrence Real writes in “How Can I Get through to you?” that “Traditional socialization teaches girls to filter their sense of self-worth through connection to others, even at great cost to themselves, while it teaches boys to filter their sense of self through their performance.” The stepmother struggles when she feels all the members of her new family wrestling with their own challenges and feelings. Her stepmother’s radar sensors are on complete 110% overload, and she feels overwhelmed.

**How to avoid an “Everyone needs to be happy” trap? You can start by noticing when you get anxious or upset about how your family.** Worrying about your family? Shift your thought and remind yourself that it takes time and patience for a healthy stepfamily to form. It will take practice to detach from your sensors driving you crazy, but you can do it. When you get less anxious, so will everyone else. (In this way, you can be a successful, positive center in your family).

**What normally happens when a woman see her family struggling? She starts trying to do things to make it better for everyone.** Women want to help with all the problems

in the stepfamily, whether they are hers or not. Her intentions are great but unrealistic. They cause her to feel resentful and unappreciated.

**How to avoid the “I want to help” quicksand? Recognize that you are trying to be responsible for the whole family, and that no one can do that – not in any kind of family.** Stepfamilies actually teach us a lot about one-on-one relationships. Let each person in the family be responsible for their own relationships. Let your husband be responsible for his kids. Stand back and let him take care of his kids when they are there, no matter how much you think you might be able to do it better. Plan and enjoy family time with your stepfamily during some of the weekend. Plan and enjoy time with your husband. Plan and enjoy time with your own biological children, if you have them. Above all, plan and enjoy time for yourself during the weekend. Step moms deserve a break too.

Need help defining your role? Need help explaining this to your husband? For more information about how to work out stepmother issues, we can help at [The Bridge Across](http://TheBridgeAcross.com).