ABOUT STEPFAMILIES
About 75 percent of divorced persons eventually remarry. Since 65 percent of remarriages involve children from a prior marriage, one of three Californians is a stepparent, stepchild, or stepsibling.

Myths about stepfamilies abound. A common one is that love is instant between stepchildren and stepparents. Another is that adjustment to stepfamily life happens quickly. While people are hopeful and optimistic when they remarry, it takes some time to get to know each other and build positive relationships.

Stepfamilies differ from nuclear families in that the dynamics are more difficult. Stepchildren who don’t live full-time with the stepfamily will take longer to move through the process; for example, if they only visit twice a month it will take longer to adjust because they have less one-on-one time. And yet, research shows that five and ten years later, most children do recover their emotional equilibrium.

Stepfamilies that learn how to navigate the process of becoming a cohesive, loving family are destined for success.

MANAGED CARE INSURANCE
Most health insurance policies cover the services of MFTs so long as the services are “medically necessary.” This typically includes coverage for face-to-face sessions for a diagnosable mental health problem. Such coverage may be limited. Please contact your health insurance company for detailed information about the coverage available to you and your family.
What You Can Do Right Now

- **Have realistic expectations.** All members of a stepfamily need to get to know each other well before a marriage takes place. Give up both the myth of instant love and the myth that there will be never-ending, unsolvable problems. Neither is true.

- **Strengthen the couple relationship.** Struggles in which the biological parent feels “in the middle” can undermine the family’s development. Couples need to communicate positively, spend time alone and be honest and open.

- **Recognize that children are members of two households.** Many stepchildren wonder where they fit in or where they belong. Children can adjust if both families communicate about rules, consequences, and establish a parenting partnership.

- **Develop new roles.** Step的母亲ing can be especially difficult because of high expectations by both men and women on what a mother should do. In the beginning, stepparents should befriend the stepchildren while biological parents do the discipline.

- **Find the right therapist.** Look for therapists with training and experience working with stepfamilies as well as someone who is warm, supportive, and goal-oriented. Use short telephone interviews to shop for a good fit with potential therapists. Ask about availability, fees, and if they accept your health insurance.

The Seven Stages of Creating a Successful Step Family

Which stage are you in? The average stepfamily takes four to seven years to go through the complete cycle. The right therapist can speed up the process.

- **Fantasy:** Feeling “Isn’t this going to be fun? ’I’ll have these great kids!”

- **Immersion:** The fantasy fades as issues emerge. Couples and families often enter therapy during this stage.

- **Awareness:** Family members can verbalize what’s not working. They gain clarity as they can name feelings.

- **Mobilization:** Adults work together as a parenting team and commit to working it out.

- **Action:** The family knows they will make it!

- **Contact:** Stepparents feel authentic and loving towards their step kids.

- **Resolution:** The family feels whole and rewarding. The stepparent feels that the stepkids are his or her kids.