

Discouraged as a Stepmom? Take a Look at What You've Done Right

A few years ago, my husband and I attended his son's 40th birthday party. It's hard to believe he was only 11 when Steve  and I married. Now he is grown, with a wife and daughter of his own.

His celebration prompted me to reminisce about the years that he, his older brother and I have spent intertwined in stepfamily living. Growing up, I had two stepmoms myself. Therefore, understanding the child's perspective often helps  when evaluating my stepmom role, but not always.

This 60-something stepmom doesn't beat herself up about the foolish choices she made as much as her younger self did. Maybe that's due to an illness that has stimulated thoughts on the brevity of life. In the process, I decided to list a few of the things I did right as a stepmom, rather than linger over the things I've done wrong.

Here are a few:

-I let my stepsons love their mom. I know my stepsons love their mom. She brought them into the world, and they have a unique bond. She passed away a few years ago, but even before that occurred, I didn't try to usurp her position even when I didn't agree with her choices. To summarize: *I gave them the freedom to love their mother without fear of hurting me.* 

-I learned how to set healthy boundaries. As a full-fledged, card-carrying codependent, it was very hard for me as a stepmom to discern how and when it was necessary to say no. This included learning the difference between a healthy, humble, loving, "No, I won't let you speak to me that way"

response as opposed to, “You want to get ugly with me—I’ll show you ugly” retaliation or vengeance.

–I accepted the things I can never control. My entire world changed once I finally accepted and embraced the revelation that I’ll never be able to control the actions of another person. This doesn’t mean ignoring or tolerating abuse; it merely means letting go of the distorted perspective that I can manipulate, command, beg or force another person to behave in an intelligent, considerate, compassionate or appropriate manner.

–I admitted my own insecurities and baggage. Did you ever drive behind a pickup truck that is so loaded to the brim with junk, the debris falls off the flatbed and flies all over the road? That’s how I came into my marriage. My heart was filled with lots and lots and lots of putrid, decaying, emotional garbage, much of it from unhealed childhood wounds. Before I could become an enjoyable mate or an effective stepmom, I needed surgery on my weary soul to remove the toxins and stench. This required professional help and time alone with God.

–I got help for my distorted view of marriage. Children of divorce often have perverted perceptions about marriage. This is especially true when the divorce was tumultuous. I was no exception. Having a single parent mom who was part of the “I am a woman, hear me roar” generation during the ’60s and ’70s didn’t help. That triumphant female victory sounds wise and courageous, but it produced confusion and frustration when I attempted to become a wife. 

I had to learn how to communicate, confront and unify with my husband in a way that benefited both of us. We attended community groups, marriage retreats, discovered the differences for stepfamilies and absorbed good resources that strengthened our union.

-I admitted I need a tribe. I needed stepmom sisters who understood this journey. God never designed us to do life alone. And I didn't know that other stepmoms felt as isolated, depressed, lonely and wicked as I did until I started reaching out to other stepmoms. It was a life jacket to a drowning woman. As much as I love and appreciate social media, there is *nothing* that compares to a hug, smile and a cup of coffee from a sweet sister stepmom to help lift my eyes off my problems.

-I learned that preaching doesn't work. In my early years, I was very aggressive about sharing my faith in Christ with Steve's sons. After a while, I discovered I was doing more to push them away than draw them in. Instead of talking about Christ, I started to merely focus on living as Christ would live. I learned more is "caught than taught."

I asked my husband what he thinks I've done right. He amazed me with words such as, "You're a great nana," "You show my kids what a good marriage looks like" and "You sacrifice and do things I know you don't want to do to make it easier on the family."

And that's when I know I'm becoming One Smart Stepmom. Not perfect—merely smarter. {eo}

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