

When an Absent Mom Wounds Your Stepchild's Soul, These Godly Insights Will Help

Recently, at a stepmom event, I observed the large number of full-time stepmoms. These are women who have their stepkids full time, and mom is no longer in the picture.

There are a variety of reasons why the numbers have significantly increased over the years. The most common are that mom is:

- Coping with a mental illness and unable to care for a child.
- Battling an addiction, perhaps moving in and out of rehabilitation.
- Chasing her dreams and trying to “find herself.”
- Choosing to leave her kids for a “soul mate.”
- Living with a physical illness that prevents her from parenting.
- Deceased.

Life as a full-time stepmom can seem like a maze of benefits and vulnerabilities. A stepchild, especially if young, may quickly embrace a stepmom. However, that doesn't mean the child isn't still longing and hoping for their biological mom to return.

The Parent-Child Bond

Parents and children share a unique, unexplainable, hard-wired bond. Keeping this attachment in mind will help the stepmom when or if the child appears standoffish, rude, depressed or miserable. Or when the child cries for the mother even though

you are filling that role so sacrificially.

When a child loses a mother, especially due to desertion, the effects are long-term and devastating. For the child, this rejection isn't about mom and her issues, it's all about them. They see this through a different lens than adults do.

The child's self-worth has been demolished. He/she believes, "I am so horrible, ugly, unlovable, disgusting and despicable that even *my own mother* doesn't love me."

Children in this situation don't blame mom; they blame themselves.

I highly recommend seeking professional help for children like this, and it's best if it's a therapist who understands kids and trauma. A "mommy wound" goes soul-deep.

For the full-time stepmom, it will take a great deal of hard work and prayer to balance the compassion, patience and forgiveness this child will need as he or she heals from the emotional loss of a parent.

And there may come a day when mom reappears and the child runs to her without any hesitation.

"I was completely devastated when my teen stepdaughter, whom I have raised since she was 4 years old, chose to leave our home and move in with her unstable mother. I walked around the house sobbing for weeks afterward," stepmom Kerry explained. "Why does she want her mother when I'm the one who has been there for her all these years? Why aren't I enough?"

It's important for a stepmom to prepare for potential pain. If the mother is still alive, it is possible she may choose to reenter the child's life at some point.

When Mom Comes Back

Reappearance is much more common than most full-time stepmoms

realize.

And, like Kerry, they are ambushed by the sense of loss and betrayal that can accompany them. This mom might stay away for a few years, and then reappear, desiring to reestablish a relationship with her child.

Begin now to think through how you will handle the anger, frustration and fear that will automatically arise should this situation occur. As the child's caretaker, be aware that after the mother appears, the child may reject a stepmom. A child who fears a good relationship with a stepmom will displease or jeopardize the relationship with her and may drop the stepmom in a minute. This is due to the soul-deep desire to bond and gain their biological mom's love and approval.

"The nicer you are to me, and the more you do for me, the more I hate you," stepson Ryan said to his stepmom. "Because you, and those mom-things you do, are a constant reminder that my own mom should be here doing them. She didn't love me enough to stay. So stop being nice to me."

As adults, we can't understand Ryan's response to his stepmom. Our thoughts are, "How fortunate this young man is to have a stepmom who stepped up and loves him so much." But to the child, it's very different. Their lens has been fractured like broken glass. All they know is, "There is something so repulsive about me that my own mother doesn't care or love me."

And the family members who have remained faithful are usually the target for their venomous arrows. That's because they know *you* won't leave them.

God explains why the child has this perspective. He uses the natural mother-child bond as the ultimate expression of love: "Can a woman forget her nursing child, and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget" (Isa. 49:15).

Full-time stepmom, you are a woman to be admired. You have taken on the role of loving a forgotten, hurting, lost child. And it's no easy task. God will strengthen you, if you ask.

Remember, you didn't create the hole in your stepchild's heart and soul. And you can't fill it.

God Doesn't Expect You to Heal Your Stepchild

He knows a soul-deep parental wound, which slashes and scorches a child's self-worth and significance, can only be healed by the great physician, Jesus Christ.

Your job is to come alongside dad, pray consistently, offer compassion, and serve when and where you can.

That doesn't mean being disrespected and abused (dad must step in to control that). It means standing firm against the very thing threatening to destroy the child. {eoa}

Laura Petherbridge is an international speaker and published author of five books who has appeared in numerous publications, TV shows and radio productions. A featured expert on the "DivorceCare" DVD series, she has been married to Steve for 35 years and has two stepsons who gifted her with two grandchildren. Join with other full-time stepmoms at Laura's next retreat, , and learn more at .

This article originally appeared at .