

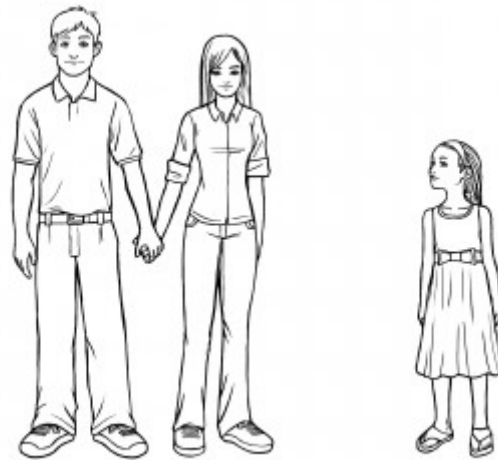
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## DAYCHILD

PARENTING PLAYBOOK

### Ten Reasons Your Stepchild Doesn't Like You and Ten Winning Ways to Respond, By Cara Day

Your step-child doesn't like you because she didn't ask to be born and then have the people who made her decide they don't want to be together anymore. Here are the top 10 reasons your stepchild is giving you such grief, followed by ten winning ways to respond.



1. **He is powerless in a situation where adults are calling all the shots.** He can't keep his parents together and he did not get to pick you. Who are you? You may as well be just another person walking down the street as far as he is concerned.

2. **She doesn't like your rules.** She didn't always like all the rules that were in place before, and she especially doesn't like the person her parent dragged in making new rules. She got in trouble enough before, and now you're making up all kinds of new reasons she should get in more trouble.

3. **He is being asked to be open to someone new at a time when he is trying to feel secure in the love his own parents have for him.** Some children wonder if their parents are going to stop loving them the way their parents stopped loving each other, even after all the promises they made to one another in marriage. And now they are being asked to like or even love a new person. No deal.

**Or, she feels very secure with each of her parents' love for her, but not with you.** This is because 1. You are new, and 2. It's been made clear by the initial divorce that despite what anyone may say or promise, you may not always be around either. Why bother?

4. **He feels guilty for liking you at all.** He thinks it is disloyal to his other parent if he holds any affectionate feelings for you. Even if he can show it when he is with you, he feels an instinct to suppress anything positive about you when he is with his other parent, creating a confusing and painful internal dilemma.

5. **She feels you take up the time and attention of her parent.** She already feels she gets less of her parent who is often distracted by the emotional and financial problems associated with divorce. And now you're here!
6. **He is clamoring for stability.** He didn't like the many changes that occurred when his family was split apart, and now you bring more change. He wonders when his life is going to settle. When is he going to start to feel normal again?
7. **Her parent acts differently now.** She doesn't like that her parent acts differently, even if those differences include being happier, having more fun, or doing new things. She doesn't like seeing you be affectionate with her parent either. Why did you have to come into the picture and change the way her parents acts?
8. **He already had enough to explain to his friends.** Now, he has to explain who you are, when he isn't even sure if he likes you. Saying he doesn't like you makes him feel ill-mannered, or mean, but saying he does like you isn't necessarily truthful. Yet another internal dilemma he has to navigate.
9. **She doesn't feel safe to make mistakes.** With her parents, she knows what to expect when she makes a mistake. With you, there's a big unknown. This creates a subtle insecurity around learning and growing that feels different than when her parents were together.
10. **He can't stop comparing you to his other parent.** From big things to little things, he is constantly noticing the things you do that are different than his other parent. He can't help it and it annoys him every time he notices something. He just wants the other parent back. So, how can you keep your stepchild from pulling out the brick and mortar? You can help keep your stepchild's walls down by doing these things:

1. **Engage in contributive parenting only:** Contribute things to your stepchild's life. Contribute experiences, opportunities, positive communication, stability, safety, skills, time, fun, and material items. Make it your daily goal to add positive elements to your stepchild's life.
2. **Leave corrective parenting to your stepchild's parents:** Do not discipline your stepchild until you have established a strong bond with him and are enjoying warmth as a family. Natural authority is built on trust, respect, and affection—and these things take time to earn. Unless you are providing significant amounts of daycare to your stepchild while their parent is away, leave the parenting to your stepchild's parents. When you have opinions about discipline, share those privately with your spouse. Do not undermine or involve yourself in front of your stepchild. Get parenting help or coaching from an outside source if needed, but do not assert yourself as a new authority. Children feel more secure when their parents remain in charge of their discipline, especially for the first couple of years.
3. **Cheerlead the other parent:** Speak kindly and respectfully about your stepchild's other parent. Refrain at all costs from speaking negatively about them in any way, even if it is true. Whenever possible, pay a compliment or say something positive. Save your venting for private adult conversations and/or sessions with your therapist.
4. **Empower her at every turn:** In divorce, children are powerless, so empower them in all the ways you can. This might mean letting her decide which restaurant you will go to,

choosing between two vacation destinations, or which bedroom she will get in a new home. Whenever your stepchild's opinion or preference can be taken into account, even with little things, take it.

5. **Remain open: Don't take things personally.** Do not engage your ego. Remind yourself constantly that your stepchild did not ask for this mess and is doing the best he or she can given the situation. If your stepchild is struggling significantly, encourage your spouse to get the outside support your stepchild needs. Always remember that no matter the circumstances, divorce is a major, and usually unwanted, change in a child's life.

6. **Let your stepchild know it is his home.** The home you live in with your stepchild, even if he is not there very often, should always be considered and referred to as his home, too. Do not say, "my home" to your stepchild. For example, "We do not do that in my home." This causes your stepchild to feel lost. Even if your new spouse and stepchild move into a house you were already living in or previously owned, make genuine mental, verbal, and physical adjustments toward it being his home as well.

7. **Contribute new experiences and traditions:** Think of new and creative ways to spend time together as well as experiences you can have as a family that perhaps he has never had. You've done this for his parent, so now be sure to show this creative energy toward the family as a whole. And, keep your ego in check if your efforts are not received with enthusiasm at first.

8. **Keep your opinions to yourself:** If you have opinions or ideas that you sense or know are contrary to the child's other parent's views, or to your stepchild's views, keep them to yourself. Do this until you have created a significant bond with your stepchild. Don't come across as insecure or like a bully by posturing and pushing your views onto them.

9. **Be curious but not forceful:** Ask your stepchild questions to get to know him, or how his day was, but don't make it an inquisition. Offer to do things he enjoys, but don't force yourself on him. If you don't get a response, back off but stay approachable and available. Do this until you feel him draw to you and follow his lead.

10. **Be kind.** In many ways, you are an outsider to your stepchild. Your stepchild has not spent all of the many hours falling in love with you that her parent has. She isn't going to love you just because her parent does. Use your best manners. Be someone she can respect as a person. Be someone she can grow to love because of the kindness and understanding you show at every turn.