

# Men's Ministry

*Good news! In order to minister to blended families, you don't have to create a whole new ministry. Just bring stepfamily awareness into your current men's ministry. Here are a few practical ideas and resources to help.*

① **DISCIPLESHIP CURRICULUM for men** that addresses general subjects like character development, for example, will apply to men who grew up in a stepfamily, stepdads, and biological fathers in blended families just as they apply to all men. But when addressing subjects like fathering and being a godly husband, be sure to address unique challenges and opportunities relevant to those in stepfamilies. For example:

- ◇ How stepparenting is different from being a biological father (see the Best Practices for Stepdads section below).
- ◇ The need to connect with stepchildren before correcting them (bonding fuels leadership). Being a disciplinarian too soon can backfire on stepdads if asserted before bonding has occurred.
- ◇ How a stepdad's role is greatly impacted by the children's biological father (living or deceased). If there is perceived conflict or competition between the stepdad and biological dad, for example, children will usually side with their father and distance themselves from the stepdad. Taking steps not to be perceived as a threat

is vital for stepdads (see the No-Threat Message below)

- ◇ How a healthy blended family marriage is intertwined with the stepdad's relationship with his stepchildren. His wife will struggle to entrust herself to him if she has issues with his relationship with her children.
- ◇ Why a stepdad needs support navigating his role. If a stepdad's wife is co-parenting with her children's biological father(s), help a stepdad find their role in the parenting process. In some cases stepdads can interact with both his wife and the kids' father, but in others, it's best he reserves his input for private conversations with his wife only.
- ◇ The need for biological fathers to feel important to their children even if a stepdad in the other home spends more time with the kids than they do.
- ◇ How biological dads who give their children "permission" to like, get along with, and/or love their stepfather, release their children from the fear of being disloyal to him. This frees their spirit, causes less internal anxiety (or

depression), and leads to less conflict between homes (a significant factor in child well-being).

## ② EQUIP STEPDADS to face unique dynamics surrounding special days and events throughout the calendar year.

- ◇ Father's Day: Help him prepare to be overlooked or even forgotten by his stepchildren. Plus, invite him to help his stepchildren connect with and/or honor their biological father, living or deceased.
- ◇ Holiday Months and Special Days: Because biological parents and children want to be together during the holidays and days that have special meaning (e.g., birthdays or cultural festivals), teach stepdads to be mindful of the dad's needs. On Father's Day he can celebrate his stepchildren's biological father (to dispel fears of competition) and encourage them to do the same. If kids can't be with their father on special days, step into their grief (another moment lost) and "hug their hurt".
- ◇ Father-Daughter Dance? Some churches host events like this for parents. While the aim is to support families and celebrate children, these events may create awkward circumstances for stepparents and children. Coach a stepdad, for example, to talk with his wife about whether taking a stepdaughter to such an event is a wise decision at this point in their relationship (a child may prefer her dad take her).

### NO-THREAT MESSAGE:

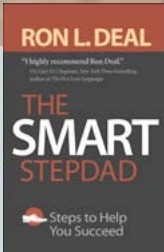
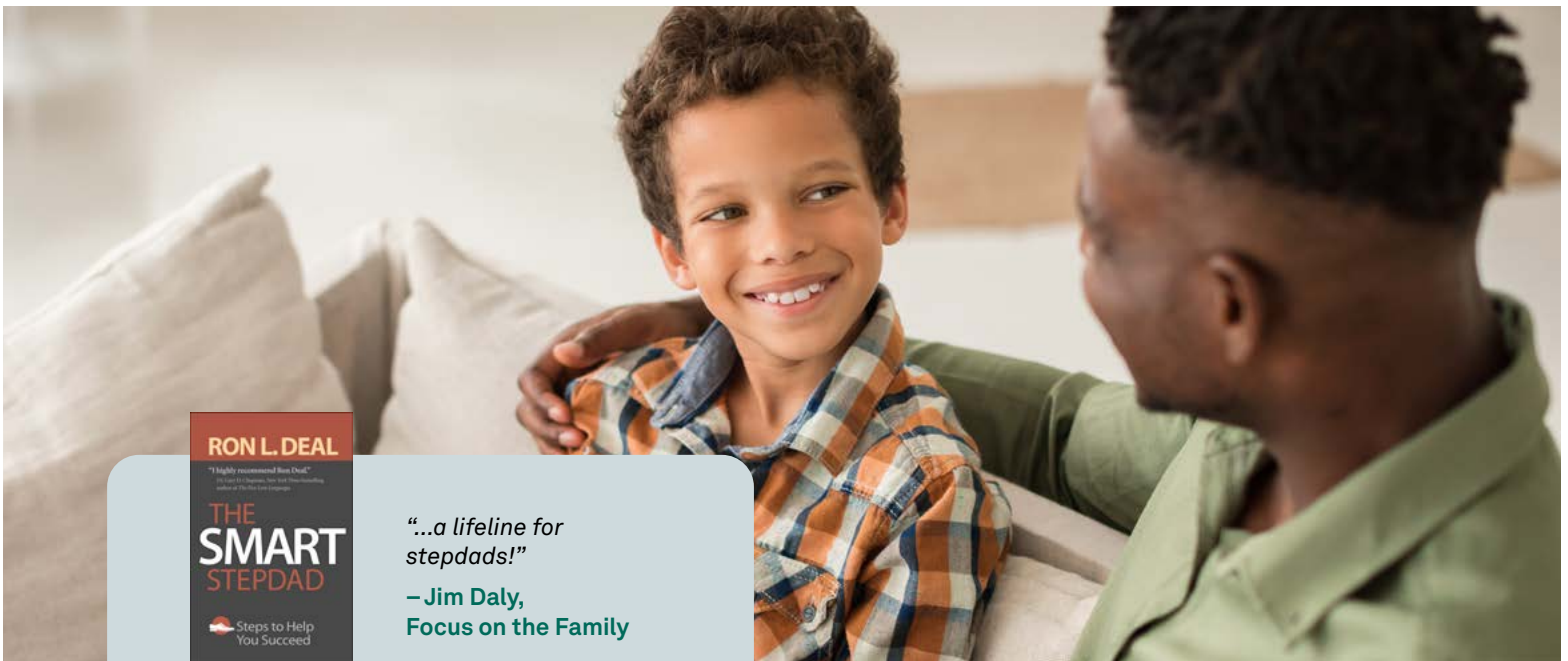
To help reduce anxiety and a sense of competition between a stepdad, his stepchildren, and their biological father, it is very helpful if stepdads will communicate the No-Threat Message, and then live it out. The below message can be communicated

by a stepdad to the biological father (and his children) in-person, via text, email, or video call (we usually let stepdads and their wives determine which is best for their circumstances). In the same way, when a biological father communicates a similar message to the stepdad, it eases the tension between homes and increases collaboration. Use the words that make sense to you, but the heart of each message is as follows.

**Stepdad to biological father:** "Hey, I appreciate you taking the time to talk with me today. I just want you to know, that I know, that you're the dad to your kids and I'm not. I respect that—and I respect you as their father. I will never get in the way of your relationship with them. Like a coach or mentor, I think of my role as someone who cares for your children and tries to be just one more adult who guides them into life. If you ever have any concerns, please feel free to communicate directly with me. Any questions? I appreciate your time, have a good day."

**Stepdad to stepchildren:** "Hey kids, I just want you to hear me say that I think your relationship with your father is very important. I'm not trying to be your dad or replace him, and I will never get in between you. I'm someone who loves your mom very much, and I also really care about you. I want to be like a teacher at school to you, or a coach, or maybe even an uncle to you. We'll figure this out together, but please know, I respect your dad and am glad you love him. Okay, let me know if you have any questions."

**Biological dad to stepdad:** "Hey, I want you to know that I appreciate all you are doing for my kids. I want to work with you and [former wife's name] as best I can because I want a healthy climate for my kids. We'll get better at this as we go, I'm sure. Just know I'm thankful for you and praying for you."



*"...a lifeline for stepdads!"*  
– Jim Daly,  
Focus on the Family

## BEST PRACTICES FOR STEP-DADS\*:

- ① Begin with the end in mind: Essentially the goal of stepparenting is to join biological parents in their task of raising and maturing healthy, responsible, faith-focused children. Focus on establishing yourself as a teacher, mentor, and influence in their life so you can be part of the “leadership team” that parents the children. You are trying to connect and bond with them so they’ll want to join you as you journey through life together.
- ② New Family Best Practices:
  - ◇ If still dating, slow down. A quick or sudden courtship actually slows your progression. Children and extended family often resent their mom’s (or dad’s) decision to marry quickly. Not a good way to start.
  - ◇ Pace with the kids. Pursue the kids but moderate your attempts to bond based on how open or closed they are.
  - ◇ Pursue kids with common sense. Find common ground on which to interact. Pray for them, listen (hold your tongue in the beginning), and give them the benefit of the doubt.
- ③ Understand the limits of your role. It’s not your responsibility to undo the past or poor parenting from your wife or her ex-husband. Come alongside these situations and try to have a positive influence over time, but don’t try to be the knight in shining armor. To this end, in the beginning of your family journey, let your wife be the one who hands down negative consequences for misbehavior. You can make these decisions together but let her be the one who hands down the consequence. This buys you time to “connect before you correct”.
- ④ Move in with tact. Don’t be a bull in a china closet.
- ⑤ Round off your rough edges. My research shows that the number one predictor of strong marriages in stepfamilies is the absence of “rough” personality characteristics in the couple, especially in the stepparent. If your personality is naturally angry, critical, aggressive, controlling, or stubborn, don’t expect your stepchildren to warm up to you—and don’t expect your wife to entrust her children to you. You must round off your rough edges.

6 Partner with your wife. Moms need to believe that you are committed to and care about her, her children, and their past experiences before you will receive their trust. Therefore, do a lot of listening before injecting your opinion; demonstrate an authentic appreciation for all she has done to provide for her children before trying to make suggestions. When you do make suggestions, especially early on, be sure to affirm what you can and don't be harsh.

7 Trust that the journey will deepen your

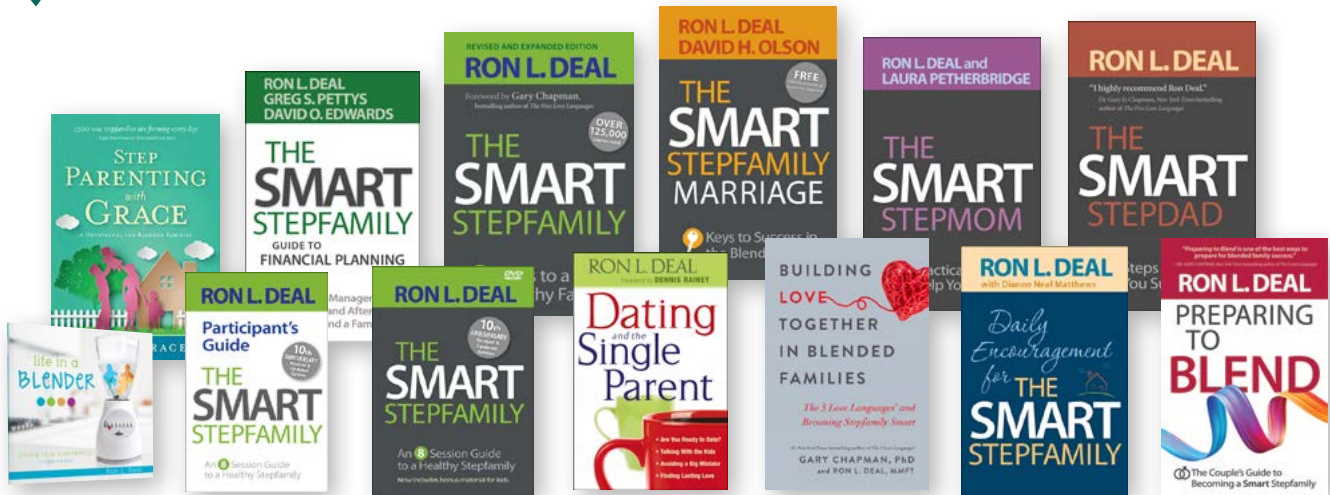
relationships. One stepdad said,

*“Becoming a stepdad is a process. At first my stepchildren were just ‘part of the package’. But after five years of being involved in their lives, investing my time, effort, and energy in their success, a bond of love has developed; they are not just her sons—they are now my sons.”*

\* adapted from *The Smart Stepdad* by Ron L. Deal



## Great Resources for Blended Families



Books & Videos | Podcast | Virtual & In-Person Events | Leader Training



[FamilyLife.com/Blended](http://FamilyLife.com/Blended)



**RON L. DEAL** is author of the bestselling book and DVD series *The Smart Stepfamily*, author of *The Smart Stepdad*, *Dating and the Single Parent*, and coauthor of *The Smart Stepmom* and *The Smart Stepfamily Marriage*. He serves as the director of FamilyLife Blended®.