

## Self-Care for Stepmoms



By Peg Nolan  
[www.thestepmomstoolbox.com](http://www.thestepmomstoolbox.com)

Have you ever felt the weight of being a stepmom bear down on you like an 800lb gorilla? Have you ever felt as if the drama of your blended family is crashing in all around and you feel helpless and hopeless? Have you ever felt like running away from home so that you would never have to deal with your step kids or your husband's ex-wife ever again?

What does the sound of your voice inside your head say? "I wish I never married a man with children," "This life is breaking me," "I dread my step children's visit," "I cringe every time my husband mentions his kids," "I didn't know it would be *this* hard."

Stop. Pause. Take a deep (deeper!) breath. It's time for self-care.

When you are dealing with your husband's ex-wife, your stepchildren, your husband, your job or any other relationship, self-care is one of the best tools you can use when the negative chatter is running rampant inside your head. No one will care for you better than you.

In 2003 I went through a painful divorce that ended my 19-year marriage and five months later, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. What I learned from these two back-to-back life-altering events was that if I didn't take care of my "self" no one else would either. I had to learn to pause and step back from the drama in my life. I had to learn to make time to value and care for me. Little did I know that the self-care regime I created for myself would become so important when I married the love of my life and became a stepmom in 2006.

### Three Key Areas of Self-Care

Physical  
Emotional  
Mental

continued...

### Physical Self-Care

Your body bears the brunt of stressful situations. Blending two families together, even under ideal conditions, can be and is stressful. Adrenaline and cortisol rushing through your system eventually takes a toll if you don't counteract the stress with your own feel good endorphins. Physical self-care isn't just about getting on the treadmill or stationary bike. It's about finding something you love to do that gets you moving and makes you feel good. For me, it's Thai Kickboxing. The warrior goddess in me loves martial arts and as a 3<sup>rd</sup> degree brown belt, kickboxing gives me the opportunity to punch and kick my anger, frustration, and stress to the curb. 45 minutes of working the bag, sparring, and doing more push-ups than I care to count leaves me spent, drained and happy.

My friend, Rose's, (stepmom to two teenage boys) all time favorite self-care activity is to go paddling. "When everything is going to hell, a day out on the river makes all the stress of it go away. There's just no possible way to dwell on the horrible stresses of your everyday life while you are picking a line through a class III rapid. In between the adrenaline of the rapids, you have the serene beauty of God's world around you, and you are surrounded by people who are supportive of you – because truly, when you paddle whitewater, you are putting your life and well being in the hands of your paddling partners, and theirs in yours."

### Emotional Self-Care

How often have you got caught in the crossfire between your husband, his ex-wife, and your stepkids? Your feelings get stomped on, trampled on, and often completely disregarded. It's up to you to own your feelings and not make any one else responsible for how you feel. Stepfamily conflicts bring out your bad feelings of frustration, anger and hostility. Emotional self-care is about cultivating the ability to process your bad feelings so that you can create more space in your heart for good feelings of love, contentment and balance.

As a certified yoga teacher, my yoga practice is the best emotional self-care I can give myself. And while my asana practice helps with physical self-care, it's the deep belly breathing, the meditation, and the relaxation I get from my yoga practice that helps me process my feelings of frustration and anger that often arise from being a full time step mom to a teenage boy.

Teresa, one of my yoga students and stepmom to a teenage daughter states, "I feel my best and most relaxed when I am practicing yoga on a daily basis. It releases tension from my body and puts me in a place of clarity, well-being, and spiritual awareness."



continued...

## Mental Self-Care

Your thinking brain often attaches to false beliefs, which can cause you to react rather than respond to uncomfortable or volatile situations. Since becoming a step mom, one of the most important lessons I have learned is that I am the only variable in my blended family. I can't change or fix my husband, my stepson, my husband's ex-wife, or anyone else for that matter. The only person I can change is me. The mental self-care I give myself is the everyday practice of detaching from my thoughts that are false.

For example, I used to believe that my husband's ex-wife should be a better mom. "Should" being the operative word here. After reading "Loving What Is" by Byron Katie and doing The Work, I realized that I was holding my stepson's mother to an unrealistic expectation. She's a great mom just as she is. It was a relief to discard this false belief because it made me feel more comfortable around her.

When it comes to my own mental self-care, my favorite sounding board is my husband. Once I've transferred negative energy through Thai Kickboxing, sorted through my feelings with my yoga practice, I can process and communicate my thoughts more clearly. Often I will write down whatever is bothering me as well as my self-care action plan and share it with him.

## Communicating Your Self-Care Needs To Your Husband

Unless your husband is psychic, I bet he's just like mine. He hasn't quite mastered the fine art of mind reading.

My husband loves it when I let him know what's bothering me, why it's bothering me, and what I'm going to do to take care of myself. He appreciates it when I approach him and say, "Sweetie, I'm having a hard time with [insert your issue here]. I don't need you to fix anything. Can you please just listen to me?" My husband says this is a great approach because he's not backed into a defensive corner.

My husband is not blind to the awesome responsibility I have as a custodial stepmom. Sometimes he'll notice when I'm frazzled before I do and he'll make me press pause. He'll pour me a glass of red wine and suggest that I grab whatever book I'm reading and soak in a hot bath for as long as I want.

As a mom I can honestly say that being a step mom is the hardest job in the world. Self-care is vital to the very soul of every stepmom who's said, "I'll do it...I'll take on this challenge."

If you are feeling beaten down by the weight of being a step mom, press pause. Take a time-out for self-care. Your mind, your attitude can change everything.



Peggy Nolan is the mother of two young adults, the stepmother of four, and grandmother of one. She is the creator and founder of the popular resource website for stepmoms, <http://thesteptomstoolbox.com>, co-host of the new monthly radio show "The Stepmom's Toolbox," and a freelance writer. Peggy frequently contributes to StepMom Magazine, Diva Toolbox, and writes about self-awareness on her blog, <http://serendipitysmiles.com>. Peggy lives in southern New Hampshire with her husband Richard, youngest stepson, and Ed the Wonder Dog.