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**StepMom**  
M a g a z i n e

Ladies: Print an extra copy of this article for the man in your life!

## What Remarried Dads Owe Their New Wives

**By Joel Schwartzberg**

When Hollywood superstar Sandra Bullock married TV celebrity Jesse James, she took on the most challenging part of her life – not just his wife, but stepmother to his five-year-old daughter Sunny. Fresh from playing a reluctant romantic partner in *The Proposal*, Bullock jumped into her reality role with complete commitment, slowing her career, facing down a trouble-prone ex-wife, comforting a stressed-out husband, connecting with James' two other children, and by her own admission, putting personal motherhood plans on hold for Sunny's benefit.

But even without these complications, stepping into a pre-existing family condition is still an awkward and precarious fit for any new spouse. The stepmother is probably the least-defined role in the contemporary family structure (though well-defined in the movies as an evil, manipulative agent of interference). A stepmom is a parent, yet not *the* parent. A caregiver but not always a *care-getter*. She donates considerable time, space, attention, resources, and family income to people from *another life*. She has not only willingly opened her private life to the one she loves, but allowed it to be invaded by needy, willful, attachments with whom she has no biological, legal, or dependent connection.

And what does the stepmom get for her trouble (while the woman from another life gets a regular alimony check)? Probably not as much as she deserves -- certainly less than she imagined when she first considered her romantic future.

This is not to say that all stepmoms are miserable and masochistic. Often they dearly love the children brought into their lives. But their needs are too frequently overshadowed by those of her husband. She is *there* for him. She is *there* for the kids. But *who's* there for her, and is it enough?

In my experience as a remarried father, I've identified six things dads with children need to realize they owe the new loves in their lives. I'm recommending them directly to dads in the hope that it will help them A.C.C.E.P.T their partner's needs alongside their own.

### **Appreciation**

As a remarried dad, you may feel you're the one being pulled, stretched, and needed -- and you undoubtedly are. But consider the stepmother: Her life has been invaded by forces she agreed to but never signed up for. Like you, she is physically anchored to your children. Being with you means she cannot pick up her life and move somewhere else. Being with you means sharing an income with your last partner. Being with you means relinquishing more privacy than she ever thought she'd have to give up.

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## Commitment

That ring on your finger says nothing about children, but too many couples let parenthood absorb and flatten their marriages, wounding and sometimes killing it. Regardless of the status of your dadhood, your wife deserves a full-time partner who is unequivocally committed to the one-on-one relationship. For that matter, so do you. Being committed means doing everything you can to protect and preserve your marriage.

## Compassion

Compassion means knowing your children bring their joyous, funny, wonderfully curious life-force to your wife's world... but also their germs, dirty dishes, sleeplessness, and incessant noise. They leave raisins and Apple Jacks in between couch cushions, toilet seats up, and toothpaste on the sink. Your wife's formerly pristine car is now a repository for used tissues, melted lip balms, sippy cups, library books, random toys, and bulky car seats. Compassion means knowing your wife pays a price for devoting herself to you, and making sure she gets a return on that investment.

## Empathy

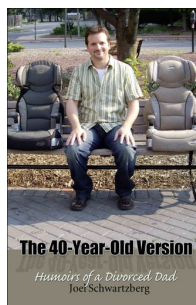
You may know what to say about your ex in front of your new wife (hint: NOTHING), but your children don't see those boundaries. They will constantly compare your wife to their mother – hairstyle to hairstyle, cupcakes to her cupcakes, jokes to jokes -- a constant reminder that while your wife may love your children, she will never in fact be their mother. A spontaneous gift now and then will show you're paying attention. But listening, understanding, and not defending yourself when she expresses frustration is infinitely more valuable.

## Patience

Your wife will have moments of understanding and willing sacrifice, and other moments of impatience and deep frustration. Be patient and have faith that any love you offer her, especially when she's down, will be returned to you in time. In a solid relationship, love is a default state.

## Time

Children gobble up time like they do M&Ms. But make sure their appetite doesn't consume too much one-on-one time with your partner. Whether you book it in advance or create it spontaneously, your time is the best thing you can give your wife, especially when you have children in the house otherwise demanding it.



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