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Linda Pellmann, LMFT treats remarried couples, stepfamilies and stepfamily children at New Life Resources, Inc. She teaches and speaks on the subject of Stepfamilies along with other issues relating to Marriage, Divorce, Family and Parenting.



*talks about*

## The Stepfamily Journey

### WHAT IS IT?

A stepfamily is defined as a household in which there is an adult couple, at least one of whom has a child from a previous relationship.

### HOW COMMON IS IT?

The stepfamily journey is becoming more familiar to each of us. Take a look at your neighborhood, church, child's classroom or your own family and you'll notice that family structure has changed. There are more than 1300 new stepfamilies forming every day and over 50% of US families are remarried or recoupled. The most recent statistics (1998) show: Over 55% of American youth are living in non-traditional families.

30% are living in Stepfamilies

23% are living with their biological mother

4% are living with their biological father

The journey quickly becomes a struggle for many of the couples.

### WHAT IS THE JOURNEY?

The path of the journey is becoming better defined and there is help for the struggling stepfamily. Most stepfamilies will encounter five stages during the beginning years. It takes an average of 7 years for the stepfamilies to feel healthy. Their journey will usually begin with the fantasy that their new family will soon feel and act like their first family but confusion will set in as the members begin to realize that their expectations are not being realized and things are not as they had hoped.

The time of confusion is followed by crisis and couples begin to wonder if they made a mistake. This is the time that many couples seek help for themselves and/or their families. This can be an opportune time to take risks to redefine and restructure the family. Stability enters the family due to the redefinition and a shared history which is forming. The members of the couple commit to other's children, the children commit to each other and the family commits to the process of success and working as a team. The long and arduous up-hill climb can bring the family to a safe resting place.

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## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

The two most important relationships during the stepfamily journey are the **COUPLE RELATIONSHIP** and **RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD**. God is the source of strength for their journey. He will redeem their souls as they allow Him to minister to their confusions and struggle. The couple relationship must stay strong to combat divided loyalties by using good communication and conflict resolution skills, setting goals and continuing to develop friendship, trust and intimacy.

The journey may be paved with potholes and curves, but the marriage and family can be successful when the process is understood and the needed tasks are visited and completed.



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