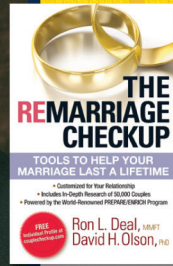


# Building Smart Stepfamilies and Restoring Family Stability



Approximately half of the children in the U.S. will have a stepparent at some point in their life. Remarriages are 10-15% more likely to end in divorce than first marriages. These numbers are staggering. Even still, the Christian community is failing to respond.

As a licensed therapist and family minister, Ron Deal saw an opportunity to reach out and help families of all shapes and sizes. What started fifteen years ago as a local ministry has developed into Smart Stepfamilies, a full-time training and consulting ministry with multiple book and video resources and the largest, most referenced website for stepfamilies in the world.

Here he talks candidly about the problems unique to stepfamilies and how the church, ministers, and Christian counselors can help them succeed despite the odds.

## When it comes to stepfamilies, what are most Christians unaware of—and how does this affect the church?

Most counselors and church leaders are surprised to learn that 100 million Americans have a step-relationship and that approximately one-third of U.S. weddings give birth to blended families. Pastoral ministries can no longer assume that traditional parent training and marriage enrichment programs are adequate. To stay relevant, churches must learn about remarriage ministry and teach smart stepfamily living.

## From both a psychological and biblical standpoint, how can ignoring these needs hurt everyone—kids, parents, the church—involved?

Multiple family transitions make it more difficult for parents to pass faith to their children. Being exposed to multiple value sets from parents and stepparents in multiple homes dilutes a coherent gospel message for children. As a result, children learn to embrace multiple values which accelerate post-modernism throughout our culture. The church must have a vested interest in restoring family stability and preventing serial divorce so that our message of Truth can be heard.

While most counselors and ministry leaders are aware that divorce and family instability lead to poorer emotional and psychological health in both children and adults, few realize the impact of serial marriage (divorce, remarriage, and re-divorce) for children. For example, in a recent issue of *Christian Counseling Today* (Vol. 18, No. 2, 2011) I reported that children of multiple parental relational transitions (including cohabitation, marriage, and divorce) are more likely to have behavioral and emotional problems, have sex at an earlier age, have their first child out of wedlock, and have a lower confidence in the institution of marriage (witnessed in our current high

cohabitation rate). With each marital transition children experience an accumulating negative impact.

## How do the Smart Stepfamilies resources help?

A blended family can be a healthy environment for both adults and children, but not if the family fails to “blend.” Two-thirds of stepcouples divorce due to the difficulties of becoming a family. The Smart Stepfamilies resources prevent re-divorce by strengthening the couple’s relationship and helping what begins as two separate families to integrate and build a healthy family identity. This not only prevents another divorce, but helps to break the generational cycle of divorce by giving children a healthy marriage model.

## How can Christian counselors, pastors, and others who work with those in stepfamily situations use—and benefit from—your materials and resources?

One key intervention is giving couples and family members stepfamily answers to stepfamily questions (traditional biological family answers often backfire). You must teach people to understand how a stepfamily best develops, why stepparenting is different than biological parenting, why children are sometimes resistant to a stepparent, and how to unify as a couple so they can lead the family from a position of solidarity. Becoming a family is much more difficult than being a couple—and you must be their guide.

The Smart Stepfamilies resources give you a practical understanding of “stepfamily answers” so you can guide your clients. Plus, when assigned to clients as supplemental reading or viewing, the resources empower couples and stepparents, and help to demystify family confusion. This offers hope to clients, gives practical solutions, and improves motivation in therapy.

## With all your experience in this field, what is the most important thing people who work with stepfamilies need to know?

Stepfamilies can be homes of redemption. I often think of blended families as “plan B”. They often originate because of great loss (through death, divorce, or an out-of-wedlock birth) and have many unique challenges that biological families don’t face. But they can still be a conduit of God’s grace. Second chances— isn’t that God’s narrative for the world?

For more information on Ron Deal and the Smart Stepfamilies resources, visit [www.smartstepfamilies.com](http://www.smartstepfamilies.com).

*Click here to buy Smart Stepfamily resources at discounted prices.*