

Can infidelity ever have a positive outcome? And how to introduce grown-up children to a new partner



Extramarital affairs have been very much in the news lately, with the hacking of adultery website Ashley Madison, and public figures such as [Prue Leith](#) talking about their own affairs.

The [Observer British Sex Survey](#) found that 77 per cent of respondents believe monogamy is natural and 92 per cent believe it is desirable. But 17 per cent of those who were in a stable relationship admitted to having been unfaithful to their partner (22 per cent of men and 12 per cent of women).

Although the numbers can be debated, it's clear that while we may hope and wish to be faithful, affairs are actually an everyday occurrence. Some will lead to the end of a marriage, with the couple who had the affair starting a long-term relationship together.

Step-families formed as a result of an affair have the most severe problems

Alison O'Mahony is a specialist step-parenting practitioner whose organisation, [Be StepWise](#), often works with families in this situation. "My research from the people who come to Be StepWise suggests that about 50 per cent of all referrals are step-families because of an affair," she says.

"This may be because step-families formed as a result of an affair have the most severe problems. The children are likely to be less able to accept the new step-parent, or feel sorrow or anger for the parent left behind."

What it's like for your grown-up children

Susan found herself in exactly this situation when her parents' marriage 'exploded' due to her mother's

affair with a work colleague. Her parents separated and the new man moved in with her mother and the children.

“I can’t remember how my mother introduced him, or meeting him for the first time. I think I’ve blanked a lot of what happened at that time,” she recalls.

“I thought he was horrible, and we had terrible arguments over silly things.”

She believes now that her intense dislike may have been her projection on to him of the distress she felt at her parents’ break-up. He later died, and Susan has always loved the man her mother met next. “I was in a different place emotionally, I suppose. I recognised Mum was lonely and needed someone in her life.”

The more open parents can be, the better, she says. Teenagers don’t want to know the details of your sex life, but they should be told what is happening.

She feels it is helpful to introduce the new partner gradually into the child’s life.

How to introduce your family to a new lover

Alison agrees: “A successful introduction – where the children feel happy and included – will provide the basis of a good relationship with the step-parent. If you don’t think it through well and it ends up going badly, it could take years to rectify.”

These are her guidelines for a parent about to introduce their new partner, always bearing in mind every situation and personality is different.

1. Don’t do it until the child is going to be receptive – whatever age they are

Wait until they have come to terms with the ending of the marriage. Do set a time limit as it’s not acceptable for them to refuse to meet your partner indefinitely. Six months may be a reasonable time for everyone.

2. Give them due warning

Don’t spring it on them unexpectedly. Raise the subject by reiterating that the end of the marriage was nothing to do with them and has no effect on your love for them, and that now you would like them to meet someone who is special to you.

3. Think about how to do it

Don’t assume that gathering your family together is the best way. It may be better to talk to each person separately.

4. Plan a fun event

Make arrangements to do something your children enjoy, even if they are grown up, and make sure you have an escape route in case you need to cut it short. Going bowling, for example, is better than a meal that has to be hastily abandoned.

5. Take it slowly

Too much too soon is counter-productive, as in the case of a father who insisted his daughters join him, his new partner and her daughters on a week's holiday. It did not go well.

“Of course, it was awful at the time and I wouldn't have wanted it to happen,” says Susan. “But I do believe I'm a stronger person as a result. It's made me more determined that my own children will have a happy childhood, and it's been one of the drivers in my life and setting up my own business.”