

Notes To Dad

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ON BEING A STEPDAD

Being a father today is hard enough, but many men are also dealing with being the "wicked stepparent."

Today about 10 percent of children in America younger than 18 live in stepfamilies. That means we have an awful lot of men out there trying to sort out their roles in an "instant family" or blended family situation — not an easy task!

Sometimes being a stepparent feels like being the "odd man out." Dads can feel left out of the mother-child relationship. Or children can resist the idea of the stepfather playing any parenting role due to the relationship with or loyalty to the biological father. It is a very complex situation for sure.

Dave, a stepdad of about seven years, stresses the need for patience. He said, "I was lucky because we were able to move into a different house when my wife and I married. We avoided the image of me trying to take over the biological father's place in the home. I would have felt like I was intruding by sitting at his place at the table, parking my car in his spot, etc. The move was like starting fresh, and I'm

sure it helped our relationship from the beginning." This move created a neutral territory for the family and contributed to the good relationship they now enjoy.

Patience is certainly important and parents should realize that the first few months, or even years, will have difficult periods. You simply can't expect instant love.

Another stepdad I know said he was "careful not to try to 'elbow in' on the territory of the biological dad." In his case, his stepson and biological father had a strong common interest in fishing. "I stayed away from that activity and instead introduced my stepson to one of my passions, archery. Not only has it expanded Tim's horizons, but has given us a non-threatening activity that we both look forward to on weekends together."

Stepparenting is usually more successful if stepparents carve out a role for themselves like this that is different from and does not compete with the biological parents.

Discipline is often a big area of conflict. It's important to set limits and enforce them for children. The parent and stepparent need to work out disciplinary ac-

Redcoats Target National Energy Policy

TRENTON, Neb. — A voice from the heart of farm county resounded throughout the national convention of Women Involved in Farm Economics (WIFE) as delegates gathered in Colorado Springs, Colo., Nov. 15-18.

WIFE's strong grassroots heritage, a belief in the importance of the family farm, and the right of farm families to receive a fair

return for their efforts and dedication was emphasized by President Cindy Cruea during her opening address.

WIFE is entering its 25th year as one of the nation's leading farm organizations. This group of dedicated farm women has continuously addressed their concerns, which so gravely affect the economic well-being of this country.

"WIFE was a pioneer in promoting the use of ethanol, thus reducing the nation's dependency on foreign oil," said Cruea. "Promoting a cleaner environment and expanding the use of our domestic farm products for use in production of renewable fuels continues to be a major priority."

When WIFE was organized in 1976 in Sidney, Neb., ethanol promotion was a driving force. Twenty-five years later, the promotion of renewable fuels continues to be a leading issue for the organization.

"WIFE urges Congress and the Administration to develop a comprehensive National Energy Plan that includes renewable fuels," said Cruea.

Drought, high fuel prices, and

low commodity prices are among the major factors in the economic dilemma facing this nation's farmers and ranchers.

"I am thankful that the Washington administration is aware of the mental, physical and spiritual stress that farm families are facing," said Cruea. "However, I believe our proud farmers and ranchers would much rather improve their financial situation through their own investments, management decisions, determination and dedication." Cruea calls on this nation's producers to encourage the use of renewable fuels.

"Join us as we fight for family farmers and ranchers and become a "Redcoat for American Agriculture."

The "Redcoats" leading the organization in 2001 include Cindy Cruea, president, Pierre, S.D.; Mary Ann Sheppard, first vice-president, Shorter, Ala.; Pat Jones, second vice-president, Lubbock, Texas; Colleen Rottman, secretary, Yoder, Wyo.; and Ardyth Triplett, treasurer, Venango, Neb. National area directors are Kathy Herdt, Veteran, Wyo.; Norma Hall, Elmwood, Neb.; and Ella Caraway, Louisville, Ala.

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Farm Injuries Builds Frustration Among Farm Safety Specialists

MARSHFIELD, Wis. — The number of traumatic, gruesome farm injuries involving young children is causing frustration among professionals involved in farm safety and health. During September and October there were media reports in North Dakota and Wisconsin of two children killed and three with limb amputations; the oldest of these kids was 9-years-old.

Having grown up on a farm 15 miles north of Marshfield, Wisconsin, Nancy Esser has an appreciation for how positive farm life is for families and children. But in the last two months, she's become aware of several serious injuries, including deaths, that have occurred on farms.

"It bothers me terribly to see these events described as 'accidents,'" said Ms. Esser. "They

are not accidents. They are predictable and preventable."

These recent events, coming on the heels of National Farm Safety and Health Week, led to multiple phone and e-mail conversations among many child safety advocates and farm safety specialists. Esser and others are feeling righteous anger as they question why children have been near dangerous farm equipment.

In other work settings, such as construction, no one would ever allow a child to be around heavy equipment, yet that same standard is not always maintained around a farm.

"Ninety percent of all farm injuries are predictable and preventable," says Gail Scherweit, safety coordinator at the North Dakota Farm Bureau and Progressive Farmer Advisory Board member.

Gail notified Esser of the 3-year-old North Dakota boy who lost both arms in a grain auger. Esser said that they had communicated back and forth via telephone and e-mail about this incident and others similar to it.

"Our frustrations were mirrored when we read statements claiming that this was 'just an accident and no one is to blame.' We are looking at strategies to inform critical audiences that farm injuries are not just 'accidents.' An accident is something

that can't be prevented. Most of the incidents which result in injury and death can be prevented by parents making better choices," Esser said.

John Shutske, Minnesota Extension Safety Specialist, described his sense of anger, frustration and hopelessness over these events. "Working in farm safety, we often walk on eggshells. We're careful not to offend farmers with talk about labor laws or child care options." John's hope is that more tough, straight talk among farmers, rural leaders and safety specialists will lead to the conclusion that "enough is enough!"

Barbara Lee, Ph.D., Children's Center Director, welcomes these frank discussions. "Having met with parents who have lost a child as a result of a farm injury, it is evident there can be long-term, negative consequences for the family. And as safety professionals, we often feel ineffective. We want to console parents on

the loss of a child, but we cannot condone decisions such as allowing children on tractors, which resulted in one of the recent deaths. We've heard of cases where a district attorney has filed criminal child neglect charges against parents, whose lack of supervision or choice of risky behavior resulted in a child's death. We hate to see it come to that," she said.



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