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*Women*

Posted on Wed, Oct 26, 2005

## Stepfamily advice

**New Husband Wants To Live In Separate Home with His Kids-Not Hers**

Dear Lisa,

My husband and I have four children between us. My two daughters (11 and 25), his biological daughter (16), and his stepson (18). We married a year after meeting and he moved from his married home (in Pennsylvania). We moved together into a rental in New Jersey with my 11-year-old daughter.

After moving together, we married, and his daughter, stepson and ex-wife became unbearable. The ex would call and leave harassing messages, and pit the daughter and her son against my husband and my children and me. His ex planted the seed and said, "How could you raise someone else's kid and not your own." My girls interact and have a relationship with their dad, yet my hubby is suffering with guilt for not having the same relationship with his.

We married in February 2004 and he just picked up and left without any notice in March 2004. He had many excuses as to why he left in a cowardly manner. We have tried counseling and he still continues to feel the guilt of his ex and his daughter. Now he's blaming me for having had control of finances when actually I earn about 40% more than he does. I was not controlling, only monitoring his spending. He had tremendous debt and I had none. He has since moved into an apartment so he doesn't feel guilty about contributing to a household where my children reside. He feels his place affords his daughter and stepson a place to visit without me and my children there.

I do love him, but will not take the mental abuse from his children, his ex or him. He wants to continue as a married couple with him having his own place. He feels being around my children makes him think of his own and creates more stress and guilt than he's willing to get help for.

Your comments welcome!  
D.S.

Dear D.S.

I'm somewhat surprised by the fact that you didn't expect a mutiny from your husband's ex and children when he moved to a different state with you. To me, it's good news that his ex and children want to be close to him, and sad that you two decided to move away from them. Perhaps you had to move for financial reasons. Or perhaps you chose to stay close to your ex, because your daughter is the youngest of the children involved.

Stacy Phillips, a family law attorney and co-author of "Divorce: It's All About Control -- How to Win the Emotional, Psychological and Legal Wars," says that when a divorced parent decides to move, he or she is in for a fight. Parents need to decide if it's worth it. "If you are willing to engage in that battle, then go first to your ex and ask if he or she will consent to it. If the spouse disagrees, you are in for a battle," she advises. Sometimes, ex-spouses decide to move together. (Visit [stepfamilytalkradio.com](http://stepfamilytalkradio.com) and click on the "This Stepmom is Moving--Along With Her Ex" show for one example).

I wonder: Did your husband ask for his ex-wife's consent before deciding to move?

I also wonder if you favored having you husband leave his kids behind. As April Masini, author of AskApril.com says, you were "not thinking well" when you chose to marry a man who would abandon his minor child to move to another state.

It sounds like your husband's ex is making your life difficult. On the other hand, she has a valid concern, says Dr. Scott Haltzman, author of "The Secrets of Happily Married Men."

"Moving away from your children can, and frequently does, feel like abandonment to them. If there were a way that all families could live close to each other, that, of course, would be the ideal," he says.

As for your husband's decision to stay married and live in a different house, I can understand why that's very difficult for you. To be honest, I also understand why he wanted to create some separate space for him and his children, given all the turmoil. He's not alone in his desire to separate the two families at first. I have heard of other divorced parents who (when they first formed a stepfamily) created "his" and "hers" spaces by moving into a duplex together. In my own stepfamily, we insisted on "his" and "hers" refrigerators. However, having two completely different places takes this idea too far. It doesn't sound like much of a marriage to me.

Haltzman says that your husband may see his decision to live in a separate home as a rational choice that helps solve a complicated problem. However, he says, "If he wants to make a marriage work, he cannot do it without being in the home. If he were called to war, or had an overseas negotiation he needed to attend, that would be one thing. But his reason for moving out is likely to drive a wedge in the relationship. He's giving the message that in order to keep the peace in his new home, he cannot include his two children in it. By taking this approach, he's making it harder for his children to know his new family, and their new stepsister."

Your husband needs to give all the children "the gift of a bigger family, with more than enough love for everyone," says Haltzman.

I agree. At their best, this is what stepfamilies can teach both parents and children: that there's enough love for everyone.

Good luck to you.

Best,  
Lisa