



## Stepbrothers Teach Their Parents

Andy and Daniel were both 9 years old. Both lived with their respective mothers. Both had time together with their fathers although Daniel's time with his father was more irregular.

Daniel's mother met Andy's father. They courted for several years during which time the boys got to know each other. They got along well as friends. Finally, Daniel's mother and Andy's father moved in together. Now Daniel was spending more time with Andy's father than was Andy. Andy's behaviour at school began to deteriorate. He had more conflict with his own mother and at times ran away.

Andy's parents agreed he needed counselling. They also agreed to come in to meet with the counselor prior to Andy's appointment. Both parents impressed the counselor as reasonable and well intentioned. However, the relationship between them was somewhat prickly. Father's change in living arrangement was causing disruption like a ripple effect and was certainly unasked for by Andy or his mother. The status quo had been altered. Andy's father was being blamed.

In meeting with Andy, he discussed how it *grossed him out* hearing Daniel refer to his father as *Dad*. Andy admitted he felt he was losing his relationship with his father to Daniel. His behaviour was designed to undermine his relationship with his mother so she would send him to his father's home and thus Andy would reassert his relationship in view of Daniel.

The counselor discussed with Andy, Daniel's feelings in the circumstance. Daniel didn't see his father as regularly as Andy. Daniel likely felt awkward when in public with his mother and Andy's dad, not knowing how to address him at times. Daniel may have felt disrespectful addressing an adult by first name, yet awkward calling him *dad* too. Andy agreed to a meeting between he and Daniel to chat about both their feelings. The parents agreed for the children to meet with the counselor for this purpose.

With support from the counselor, Daniel expressed how he felt jealous of Andy's relationship with his father, even though, he sees him more than Andy. Daniel also expressed embarrassment when in public

feeling awkward calling Andy's father "Dad" or by his proper name, something he felt was disrespectful. The counselor's impressions of Daniel had been supported by his report.

Hearing Daniel's feeling directly had an impact on Andy. Andy, a compassionate lad, expressed his regret to Daniel for his less than satisfying relationship with his own father. Further, the boys discussed their mutual awkwardness and upset feelings for the situation in which they found themselves. Neither blamed the other for anything. They just dealt with the issues at hand.

Spontaneously, Andy offered to Daniel that he could call his father *Dad* when in public. He asked that he not do it around the house when he is there though. Daniel agreed and thanked Andy for his permission. Thus boys were OK with each other.

While the boys reached a resolution, Andy was still not fully satisfied. He expressed a desire to have more time with his father. Meeting thereafter with the parents, Andy's mother and father agreed to extend the weekend time with father from Sunday evening to Monday morning at which time the father would return Andy to school. Andy was delighted with the news. The counselor was delighted with the reasonableness of the parents.

Life goes on and things change. This is inevitable. No one is really to blame. This is life. Crises develop as a result of resistance to change though. Facilitate change and crises subside.

The stepbrothers got it together. They negotiated the terms of their relationships. Interestingly, they were a good role model for the parents whose adaptation followed theirs.

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