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### SOMEONE ELSE'S CHILDREN

At first glance, it would seem a doomed relationship – an ex's children. However, with more and more divorces, and better acknowledgement of the need children have for maintaining contact with both sets of parents, it's no longer acceptable to draw battle lines as in times past. So, as children of separated parents shuttle up and down on contact visits and holidays, step-siblings become significant new presences in their lives. And, consequently acquire a curious importance to the other parent too, the one not related to those children by either blood or marriage.

This was certainly my experience when my ex-husband got re-married and acquired two step-sons who were about the same age as my daughter. Daunted as I was at first, I could not fail to be pleased by the general glee all three children displayed at being so suddenly landed with a new brother/sister. When one of the boys visited England soon after on a school trip, my daughter could hardly contain her excitement and we took the pair of them out for a pub meal, thereby getting to know the lad a bit better ourselves. Luckily, he turned out to be enormously likeable and all last doubts were finally dispelled when my daughter returned from her first summer holiday with her step-family, eyes shining because her step-brothers had made it much more fun than ever before. This despite her special needs which nearly had her murdering the younger boy's pet mouse by spearing it with a pencil.

As my daughter does not have any blood-siblings, it is quite likely that her step-brothers will become her emotional mainstay in years to come. Does this not make them an 'insurance policy' for the future that I must surely invest in as well?

So what are they now – my ex-husband's children, my daughter's step-siblings, my step-step children? Such negative terms, all remote and cold. Surely someone ought to come up with a nicer term for this potentially delightful, peculiarly 21st century relationship.

## On step-children for INDIA TODAY

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