



GSOC.FA11 Reconstituted Families: Step-Parenting and Blended Family Life

AQA 8192 • Calculators not allowed • about 65 minutes

Total Marks

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Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Answer ALL questions. For two extended questions (the 8-mark and 12-mark) write in full sentences. Use sociological terms and, where asked, refer to the short Item provided.

- 1** Which one of the following best describes a reconstituted family in the context of family sociology in the UK?

- ☐ A) A household where three or more generations live together
- ☐ B) A family formed when two adults with children from previous relationships marry or cohabit
- ☐ C) A single-parent family with no contact with former partners
- ☐ D) A family where children are adopted by distant relatives

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

- 2** Define what sociologists mean by 'step-parent' in the study of reconstituted family life in the UK context.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

- 3** Identify and explain one difficulty step-parents often face when building a relationship with their step-child in reconstituted families.

(Total for Question 3 is 2 marks)

- 4** Identify and explain two ways sibling relationships may change in a household after two families blend, giving sociological reasoning.

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

- 5** Describe one practical challenge a household faces when a new partner moves into a reconstituted family home in the UK.

(Total for Question 5 is 3 marks)

- 6** Explain two reasons why step-parents and biological parents sometimes disagree over discipline in reconstituted families.

(Total for Question 6 is 4 marks)

- 7** State one ethical issue a sociologist should consider when interviewing children about their experiences in a reconstituted family.

(Total for Question 7 is 2 marks)

- 8** Identify and explain one theoretical reason why reconstituted families may require active negotiation of roles more than nuclear families.

(Total for Question 8 is 2 marks)

- 9** Look at Item A: Laura and Marco form a new household. Laura has two children aged 8 and 12 who visit their father every other weekend. Marco has a 10-year-old daughter who lives mainly with her mother. Both adults plan to work full time. Describe two challenges from Item A that illustrate adjustment pressures in reconstituted family life.

Item A: Laura and Marco form a new household. Laura has two children aged 8 and 12 who visit their father every other weekend. Marco has a 10-year-old daughter who lives mainly with her mother. Both adults plan to work full time.

(Total for Question 9 is 4 marks)

- 10** Using Item A above, explain one advantage and one disadvantage to the children of having a reconstituted family where both new partners work full time.

(Total for Question 10 is 4 marks)

- 11** Explain how the concept of 'family loyalty' can create tension in reconstituted families, giving a short example.

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(Total for Question 11 is 6 marks)

- 12** Give one example of how public services, such as schools or health services, may need to adapt their records or practice to support reconstituted families in Britain today.

(Total for Question 12 is 3 marks)

- 13** Identify and explain two policy changes that could help reduce financial strain in reconstituted families, referring to UK social policy ideas.

(Total for Question 13 is 4 marks)

- 14** State one research method sociologists might use to study everyday relationships in reconstituted families and one advantage of that method.

(Total for Question 14 is 2 marks)

- 15** Discuss the everyday challenges faced by reconstituted families when step-parents move in, considering sociological perspectives and giving a supported judgement in relation to role negotiation and family conflict.

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(Total for Question 15 is 8 marks)

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- 16** Discuss how far sociologists would agree that reconstituted families face more long-term instability than other family types, using competing perspectives and reaching a supported conclusion.

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(Total for Question 16 is 12 marks)

Mark scheme · GSOC.FA11 Reconstituted Families: Step-Parenting and Blended Family Life

Question 1

- **B1** B (a family formed when two adults with children from previous relationships marry or cohabit)
- **Answer: B**

Question 2

- **B1** identifies that a step-parent is a person who is married to or cohabiting with a child's parent but is not the child's biological parent
- **B1** development, e.g. may take on parenting responsibilities and role negotiations with the child and other adults
- **Answer: A step-parent is a person who is married to or cohabiting with a child's parent but is not the child's biological parent; they may take on parenting responsibilities and negotiate roles with the child and other adults.**

Question 3

- **B1** identifies a difficulty, e.g. loyalty conflicts between the child and their non-resident biological parent
- **B1** develops the point, e.g. the child may feel disloyal if they accept the step-parent, making trust and closeness take longer to build
- **Answer: One difficulty is loyalty conflicts between the child and their non-resident biological parent; the child may feel disloyal accepting the step-parent, so trust and closeness can take longer to develop.**

Question 4

- **B1** identifies first way, e.g. tensions between stepsiblings over shared space or resources
- **B1** develops the first way, e.g. competition for bedrooms, attention or allowances can create conflict
- **B1** identifies second way, e.g. development of new closeness or friendship between previously unrelated children
- **B1** develops the second way, e.g. joint activities and time together can build sibling bonds over time, creating new support networks
- **Answer: Two changes are tensions between stepsiblings over shared space or resources, since competition for bedrooms, attention or allowances can create conflict, and the development of new closeness where previously unrelated children form friendships through joint activities, building new support networks.**

Question 5

- **B1** identifies a practical challenge, e.g. reorganising finances and household budgets
- **B1** development, e.g. combining incomes, paying child maintenance and deciding who pays for new expenses can be difficult
- **B1** further development or example, e.g. disputes may arise over how money is shared between biological children and step-children
- **Answer: A practical challenge is reorganising finances and household budgets when combining incomes, managing child maintenance and deciding who pays for new expenses, which can cause disputes over how money is shared between biological children and step-children.**

Question 6

- **B1** identifies first reason, e.g. different parenting styles and values between the partners
- **B1** develops first reason, e.g. one parent may favour stricter rules while the other prefers negotiation, causing conflict
- **B1** identifies second reason, e.g. questions of authority and legitimacy for the step-parent
- **B1** develops second reason, e.g. step-parents may be unsure how much discipline is appropriate without appearing overbearing or displacing the biological parent
- **Answer: Disagreements arise from different parenting styles and values, for example one partner favouring stricter rules while the other prefers negotiation, and from questions of authority and legitimacy, since step-parents may be unsure how much discipline is appropriate without appearing overbearing or displacing the biological parent.**

Question 7

- **B1** identifies an ethical issue, e.g. need for parental consent and child's assent
- **B1** brief development e.g. ensuring the child agrees and is not pressured and that sensitive topics are handled carefully

Question 8

- **B1** identifies a theoretical reason, e.g. role ambiguity where expectations are not predefined
- **B1** develops the reason, e.g. unlike many nuclear families where roles may be more established, reconstituted families must negotiate who disciplines, cares for and makes decisions
- **Answer: A theoretical reason is role ambiguity where expectations are not predefined; unlike many nuclear families where roles may be more established, reconstituted families must negotiate who disciplines, cares for and makes decisions.**

Question 9

- **B1** identifies a first challenge from Item A, e.g. coordinating visiting schedules and shared time between different non-resident parents
- **B1** develops the first challenge, e.g. clashes over weekends and practical care arrangements create stress
- **B1** identifies a second challenge from Item A, e.g. negotiating parenting roles and authority while both adults work full time
- **B1** develops the second challenge, e.g. limited time for bonding with step-children and reliance on childcare may hinder relationship building
- **Answer: Two challenges are coordinating visiting schedules with non-resident parents, since clashes over weekends and practical care create stress, and negotiating parenting roles and authority while both adults work full time, because limited time for bonding and reliance on childcare may hinder relationship building with step-children.**

Question 10

- **B1** identifies an advantage, e.g. more household income available
- **B1** develops the advantage, e.g. better finances can mean more resources, activities and material security for the children
- **B1** identifies a disadvantage, e.g. less adult time available for childcare and emotional support
- **B1** develops the disadvantage, e.g. children may feel less supported, have less time to bond with step-parents and depend more on external childcare
- **Answer: An advantage is more household income, which can provide more resources, activities and material security; a disadvantage is less adult time for childcare and emotional support, which may reduce bonding with step-parents and increase reliance on external childcare.**

Question 11

- **B1** identifies that family loyalty refers to a child feeling allegiance to their biological parent
- **B1** explains that accepting a new partner can be seen as disloyal by the child
- **B1** explains this can cause the child to reject rules or attempts at closeness from the step-parent
- **B1** links the tension to conflicts between adults, e.g. biological parent may defend the child against the step-parent, undermining authority
- **B1** gives a short example, e.g. a teenager refusing to call the new partner 'dad' or 'stepdad' and the biological parent taking the teenager's side
- **B1** provides development, e.g. over time negotiation and clear boundaries can reduce the tension, but it may persist into adolescence
- **Answer: Family loyalty means a child feels allegiance to their biological parent, and accepting a new partner can be seen as disloyal by the child, causing them to reject rules or closeness from the step-parent. This can lead to conflicts between adults if the biological parent defends the child, undermining the step-parent's authority. For example, a teenager may refuse to call the new partner 'dad' and the biological parent may side with the teenager, creating ongoing tension that may reduce only after negotiation and clear boundaries.**

Question 12

- **B1** identifies an example, e.g. schools recording multiple parental contacts and legal responsibilities
- **B1** develops the example, e.g. ensuring both biological and step-parents can be contacted in an emergency or invited to meetings where appropriate
- **B1** further development, e.g. noting the need to respect confidentiality or legal custody arrangements
- **Answer: One example is schools recording multiple parental contacts and legal responsibilities, ensuring both biological and step-parents can be contacted in an emergency or invited to meetings as appropriate, while respecting confidentiality and custody arrangements.**

Question 13

- **B1** identifies first policy change, e.g. clearer rules on benefits and child maintenance when households include children from different parents
- **B1** develops first change, e.g. reducing gaps or conflicts in entitlements could ease budgeting and reduce disputes over resources
- **B1** identifies second policy change, e.g. increased support for affordable childcare for working blended families
- **B1** develops second change, e.g. subsidised childcare can allow both adults to work and reduce financial stress
- **Answer: Two helpful policies are clearer rules on benefits and child maintenance when households include children from different parents, reducing entitlement gaps and easing budgeting, and increased support for affordable childcare so both adults can work, reducing financial strain in blended families.**

Question 14

- **B1** identifies a method, e.g. qualitative interviews with family members
- **B1** gives an advantage, e.g. produces detailed, in-depth accounts of feelings and role negotiations that quantitative data might miss
- **Answer: A method is qualitative interviews with family members, and an advantage is they produce detailed, in-depth accounts of feelings and role negotiation that quantitative data might miss.**

Question 15

- **B1** expects coverage of everyday challenges such as role ambiguity, discipline disputes, loyalty conflicts, resource sharing and scheduling
- **B1** expects application of at least one sociological perspective or concept, e.g. role negotiation, family systems, or feminist ideas about care and authority
- **B1** expects application of a second perspective or contrast, e.g. functionalist emphasis on stability through clear roles versus interactionist focus on negotiated meanings
- **B1** expects evaluation and development, e.g. noting that while role negotiation can be a source of conflict it can also lead to new family bonds over time
- **B1** expects use of an example or brief reference to research or a hypothetical scenario to support points
- **B1** expects a supported judgement or conclusion that weighs perspectives and evidence about whether difficulties are likely to be temporary or long-term
- **B1** expects clear organisation and sociological vocabulary appropriate to GCSE
- **B1** expects recognition of variation between families, e.g. class, age of children and contact with non-resident parents affect outcomes
- **Answer: Indicative content: Candidates should discuss everyday challenges such as role ambiguity when step-parents move in, disagreements over discipline, loyalty conflicts with non-resident parents, and disputes over money, time and shared space. Apply sociological perspectives: a functionalist view might stress the need for clear roles for family stability and see role negotiation as a problem to be resolved; an interactionist approach emphasises how family members construct meanings and negotiate new identities, explaining why step-parents must build authority slowly; feminist perspectives note how gendered expectations about care and authority may shape who does housework and who disciplines children. Evaluate by noting role negotiation can both cause conflict and create new bonds, and that outcomes vary by age of children, economics and the ongoing involvement of previous partners. Conclude with a supported judgement about whether challenges tend to be transitional with appropriate support and negotiation, or long-term where structural pressures persist.**

Question 16

- **Level 1** (1-3): Basic statements about reconstituted families with little sociological explanation or use of perspectives. Limited or no judgement.
- **Level 2** (4-6): Clear description of one or two challenges facing reconstituted families and some use of sociological ideas, with an attempt to compare with other family types. Limited evaluation or conclusion.
- **Level 3** (7-9): Good analysis using at least two sociological perspectives to explain why reconstituted families might be less stable, and counterarguments showing why stability is not inevitable. Some sustained evaluation and a tentative conclusion.
- **Level 4** (10-12): Thorough, balanced discussion drawing on multiple perspectives, for example interactionist accounts of negotiated roles, functionalist views on the importance of clear roles, feminist analyses of gendered care responsibilities, and consideration of structural factors such as poverty and contact with non-resident parents. Clear, supported conclusion that weighs evidence and acknowledges variation between families.
- **Indicative content:**
 - Arguments that reconstituted families may be less stable: role ambiguity causes conflict; loyalty issues between children and biological parents; complex financial and legal arrangements create stress; evidence that stepfamilies experience higher rates of remarriage breakdown in some statistics
 - Interactionist perspective: emphasis on negotiated roles and meanings, so instability may result when members fail to agree identities and expectations
 - Functionalist perspective: stability relies on clear role allocation, so reconstituted families may struggle until roles are settled; however functionalists might argue role clarity can be achieved, restoring stability
 - Feminist perspective: gendered expectations about care and authority can create additional pressures, especially if women shoulder most childcare while working
 - Structural factors: poverty, housing shortages and patterns of contact with non-resident parents influence stability and vary by class and age of children
 - Counterarguments: many reconstituted families successfully negotiate roles and form lasting bonds; some non-reconstituted families also face instability due to unemployment or illness
 - Use of examples or brief reference to research or hypothetical cases to illustrate points, for example tensions over discipline vs examples of successful step-parent attachments
 - Supported conclusion balancing the evidence, noting that sociologists would not fully agree, and that outcomes depend on negotiation, resources, contact arrangements and individual family histories