

Holiday Challenges for Blended Families

Blended families are essentially born from heartache and loss:

- The previous family situation ended through death or divorce which can leave both parents and children with feelings of loss, guilt, remorse, and anger.
- Each family member has processed his/her feelings to varying degrees, but residual feelings are likely to remain.

Although each family works out issues differently, and no one approach is right for everyone, some general principles may help the decision-making process.

Guidelines for Blended Families

1. Remember that the key to a successful holiday is communication with children, current spouse, former spouse, and others affected.
2. Begin discussing expectations early because it often takes a good while to make appropriate arrangements and negotiate compromises.
3. Rather than split the holiday between parents, it is often best to alternate holidays. Or allow the children to celebrate the holiday with one family and have a “second holiday” with the other family.
4. Consider allowing the former spouse more latitude during the first holiday, because he/she may feel threatened by the new alliance. An initial compromise also sets a healthy precedent for future negotiations.
5. Remember that the holidays are a special time for children, and strongly consider their needs and desires. Holidays aren’t the time to engage in a power struggle with a former spouse.
6. Make schedules for children so they will know what to expect.
7. Ask children to write a wish list so that parents and other relatives can work together to determine what wants and needs will be provided by each person.
8. Don’t compete to see which parent can provide the “best” holiday for their child. Children can’t win when they are involved in loyalty conflicts.
9. Teach children to choose appropriate gifts for family members, including their parents and stepparents.
10. Remind children who receive gifts from many sources that it is unkind to gloat in front of stepsiblings who don’t receive as many gifts.
11. Don’t expect the blended family to observe traditions like a typical nuclear family.
12. Develop new rituals, but don’t introduce too much change too fast.
13. Keep the focus on problem-solving rather than proving someone right or wrong.