



Blended Families and the Holidays: Making a Good Mix Better

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Family gatherings are at the core of many holiday celebrations and traditions. But for blended families, the stress of trying to juggle schedules, smooth over hard feelings and meet expectations of the “perfect” holiday can make the season less than merry.

But just because your family didn’t walk right out of a Norman Rockwell painting doesn’t mean you can not have a joyful, meaningful holiday with your loved ones. Judy Burr-Chellin, a therapist at Wellspring Family Services Parent Child Services offers these tips for a saner holiday for you and your family:

Schedule in advance

Not everyone can be in the same place at the same time. Negotiate with your family members. For example, if you have the kids for Christmas this year, your ex can have them next year. Or maybe the kids will be at Grandma’s for the main holiday gathering while your immediate family hosts a smaller event on a different day.

Be flexible

Just because a holiday falls on a certain date does not mean it has to be celebrated on that date. Your celebration can be the weekend before, the day after or whenever you wish to celebrate it. If your sister-in-law just has to have dinner and gift giving at her house this year, let her and relax; at least you have less cooking and cleaning to do at your house.

Include your kids in your planning process

Talk to your children and step children about your plans for the holidays well in advance. Show them the calendar and let them know where they will be staying, and with whom and how they will get there. And most importantly, Judy says, let them know that they have a family that loves them, including step parents and siblings.

Head off conflicts before they happen

If talking politics at the dinner table sets Grandpa off every time you get together, avoid the topic or gently change the subject. If Aunt Martha begins saying negative things about the children's other parent, again gently change the subject. You can make it clear that those topics are not appropriate to discuss at that moment.

Make new memories

Perhaps your family had a certain way of celebrating before a divorce, or maybe you have a new family member who is of a different religious or cultural background. The holidays are what you make them. Start new traditions that include everyone.

And most importantly, she adds, keep in mind there is no such thing as the "perfect" family or "perfect" holiday. Keep your perspective and your sense of humor and you will enjoy the holidays more.

Judy Burr-Chellin is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor, Child Mental Health Specialist and Infant Mental Health Specialist with over 25 years experience. She is also Director of Parent Child Services at Wellspring Family Services in Seattle, Wash. She is available for interviews and television appearances. For more parenting information and resource articles, contact Rebecca Snyders at Wellspring Family Services; 206 902 4238; rsnyders@wellspringfs.org