

Blended families have additional stresses that may include -

- **spending time with ex-spouses and multiple sets of grandparents,**
- **visiting kids who may be homesick for the other parent,**
- **loneliness if your child is spending time with the other parent,**
- **step sibling rivalry,**
- **competitive gift giving,**
- **a bunch of children who may be over excited and over indulged transitioning between households.**



Everyone is run ragged and spread too thin, planning, cooking, working around conflicting family schedules, and organizing transitioning kids.

The Holiday Season is an emotional time that can make problems and issues more acute; even though everyone is supposed to be enjoying themselves and each other, tension and anxiety can take over.



SECRET TO REDUCING HOLIDAY STRESS

Rules of thumb

- Remember that your goal is to avoid lasting stress and pain for your children. The following tips can save them a lot of heartache.

Take it somewhere else.

- Never argue in front of your children, whether it's in person or over the phone. Ask your ex to talk another time, or drop the conversation altogether.

Use tact.

- Refrain from talking with your children about details of their other parent's behavior. It's the oldest rule in the book: if you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all.

Be nice.

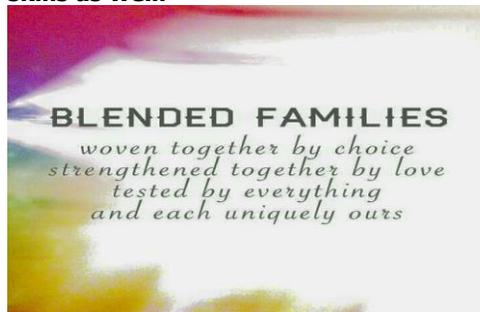
- Be polite in your interactions with your ex-spouse. This not only sets a good example for your kids but can also cause your ex to be gracious in response.

Look on the bright side.

- Choose to focus on the strengths of all family members. Encourage children to do the same.

Work on it.

- Make it a priority to develop an amicable relationship with your ex-spouse as soon as possible. Watching you be friendly can reassure children and teach problem-solving skills as well.



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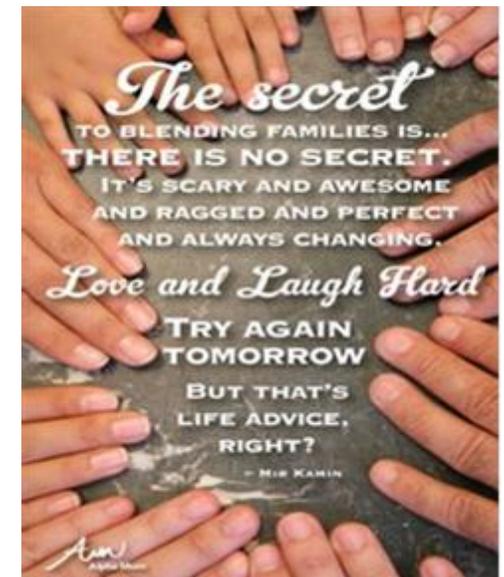


The Holiday Season is fast approaching and for many, it's a mixed blessing.

Who isn't charmed with glittering store displays, excited children, and all the tempting cookies and candies everywhere?

There are high expectations and multiple pressures to ensure happy Holiday celebrations.

Stepfamilies take the busy-ness of the holiday season and compound it – times two.



FOCUS ON THE CHILDREN

Place a picture of the children on the table and ask: "What do you think they would really enjoy? What would work for them?" "The most important thing is to continue to be loving parents and to keep the conflict away from the children"

MAKE A PLAN

If you haven't set a holiday schedule, do it now. You don't want the children to have any angst about what they're going to be doing at Christmas

DETERMINE YOUR HOLIDAY PARENTING TIME SCHEDULE

Armed with what you want and what you're willing to give up, you're ready to talk with your ex about defining your actual holiday parenting plan.

BE FLEXIBLE ABOUT THE DAY OF CELEBRATION

This is probably the hardest part for parents to concede. What should a parent do if he or she can't share the actual day with his or her children? Focus on being together whenever you can, and make other occasions celebratory. Be flexible and unconventional.

CHOOSE A LOCATION

How do you choose a location that best honors the children's wishes, keeping in mind they come first this time of year? This is more likely to occur with older children, especially during college. They want to go home, see their room, see friends.

DECIDE WHAT MATTERS MOST TO YOU

Take some time to think about what's most important to you. Certainly, knowing what you want gives you a starting place for negotiating with your ex. Negotiate a compromise with your ex about your holiday schedule

BE OPEN TO MAKING COMPROMISES

Remember that reaching a compromise with your ex means being willing to give something up. Consider new ways to tap into your kids' enthusiasm.

STAY HOPEFUL

It isn't perfect — no family is; emotions can run high. Early days can be difficult -- Remember that just because things are hard now, it doesn't mean it has to be that way forever.

FORGET FEELING LEFT OUT

If you disagree on something to do with the kids, take the argument behind closed doors and return when you can present a united front.

BE CREATIVE

Compromises won't always be convenient, they can be a means to getting some of what you want -- like spending time together, even if it's not on 'the' day

CREATE NEW HOLIDAY TRADITIONS

Splitting holiday time with your ex makes carving out some time for your favorite traditions even more important. So put things like decorating for the holidays, going caroling, baking Christmas cookies, and making ornaments on your calendar, too.

LOOK AT CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

Put some Christmas music on the radio and enjoy the holiday lights. If looking at lights doesn't sound exciting enough, turn the adventure into a family scavenger hunt. Drink hot chocolate or eat a special holiday snack that is reserved for "Christmas light night" and you'll make it an extra special time to remember.

VOLUNTEER FOR A DAY

Volunteering can help you keep the focus off material goods. Whether you decide to work at a local toy drive, pet some puppies or kittens, volunteer work as a family can bring you closer together while also making a difference

BAKE HOLIDAY TREATS & DELIVER THEM

Spend a day baking Christmas cookies or holiday treats together. Then, deliver them to friends and family

PERFORM AN ACT OF KINDNESS

Working together as a family to do something kind for others can be a great way to remember the true meaning of the holidays. You can even make it a year-round venture. Save up your change in a jar and then as the holidays approach, decide how to give the money to someone who needs it more than you do.

MAKE A FAMILY MEAL TOGETHER

Assign a specific course to everyone in the family and work together to make a delicious holiday meal.

ENJOY A HOLIDAY MOVIE MARATHON

Stay up late watching movies together once a year. Let everyone in the family pick out their favorite movie and spend the evening watching them on the couch.

MAKE ORNAMENTS

Making your own ornaments can be a great way to give your Christmas tree special meaning. You can even make time capsule ornaments. Buy clear glass balls, fill them with something that will remind you of this past year. Write out a few highlights of the year and slip it inside or put small mementos inside the ornament.

PLAN EARLY

It's especially important for blended families. You need time to make sure everyone has agreed to the plan and knows where they are going to be.

EXHIBIT THE COUPLE'S STRENGTH

The remarried couple should try not to undermine each other. They have to show a united front. For example, if the biological father's children are misbehaving, father has to back up his spouse and vice versa.

STEPFAMILY MEMBERS BATTLE INSECURITY

Children who lost their original family to death or divorce are uncertain the stepfamily will stick. Stepparents feel used and unappreciated, and parents often end up caught in the middle.

CREATE NEW TRADITIONS

Building new rituals is an important part of moving on — for both parents and children

BUILDING STRONG BONDS

Support one another by being willing to listen and validate each other's feelings. It is important to that child(ren) who are adjusting to a new stepfamily, until feel they are heard and understood when they struggle with issues.

EVERYONE ON THE SAME PAGE

Stepfamilies can create lasting memories as they celebrate the holidays - together or apart; and successfully enjoy being together. Decorate together; look for ways to bond

ENCOURAGE EACH MEMBER

Encourage each member of the blended family to develop positive, nourishing relationships. Don't force relationships, though. Children work at their own speed when it comes to building relationships. Let them take the lead and you be their cheerleader.

NURTURE EACH CHILD'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE OTHER PARENT

This is difficult for some, especially if the child's other bio parent stirs up drama. Regardless of the behavior of the other parent, it's important for you to encourage a child to love both parents

SURROUND YOURSELF WITH SUPPORT

Reach out to grandparents, support groups or community-based programs to help the blended family adjust.