

Family Living Focus

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family has to celebrate a given holiday on its official date? Who says all members of your blended family need to be together on a particular holiday? Do your best to stay out of power struggles with former spouses and other family members about where the children will spend the holiday. If you adopt a flexible attitude, you'll discover many satisfactory ways to celebrate holidays.

For example, in your family you may decide to celebrate Thanksgiving on the following Sunday. In the short run, this may ease the stress on everyone.

You may start a new tradition in your family. Creating new ways of celebrating encourages the growth of bonds between family members and creates pleasant memories that are not rooted in the more distant past.

Encourage sharing of feelings. Let youngsters, grandparents, and others share their feelings. Listen sensitively without interrupting or trying to fix problems they share with you. You may not agree with everything a person says (and you certainly will not be able to accommodate everyone's preferences), but family members will appreciate your listening to them and taking their needs into account.

Allow time and space for the child whose biological parent is not present to express sadness, regret, or guilt. Sometimes a child will feel disloyal to the absent parent. Acknowledging such emotions helps the child move through these feelings rather than getting stuck in them. Reassure the child who will not be with you that he will be missed, but that you will be all right. Give

him permission to enjoy himself with the parent he visits. If you have conflicting emotions, confide in a caring adult rather than your child.

Plan Ahead. Discuss options and plan in advance of a given holiday. Encourage family members to share their ideas, as it helps everyone voice their opinions and avoid unrealistic expectations.

Deciding how to celebrate the holidays may not be easy, but planning in advance can help you bypass problems. Particularly when young children are involved, it is nice to anticipate the holidays without the stress of last-minute planning. Remember, keep the plans simple.

Avoid Competition. In blended families, stepparents, former spouses, grandparents, and other adults may compete for the time, favor, and attention of children in the family. Sometimes children, taking their cues from adults, compete for the favor of others, too. This competitiveness, while subtle, damages family well-being and promotes an unhealthy air of tension. Realize that the competitiveness is usually rooted in jealousy and feelings of personal inadequacy.

Focus on being the best person you can be. Appreciate your positive qualities and those of your family. Enjoy yourselves. Avoid feelings of jealousy and unhealthy competition.

Avoid over-commitment. Three complete holiday meals in one day are too much for anyone's stomach! This example is just one way blended families may over-commit during a holiday. Do less, better. Keep your celebrations manageable and enjoyable. End family get-togethers before fatigue sets in, and plan activities that leave everyone relaxed when they're over.

If you share gifts, be thoughtful, fair, and creative, making sure you don't spend more than you can afford.

Rise above bitterness. Make it a game to see if you can be calm and even-minded in challenging circumstances. Children in blended families are relieved and adjust best when the adults are at least pleasant to one another. Children may not care all that much when, where, or how they celebrate a holiday. However, it is very important to them that the adults they love get along with each other. Look upon challenging relationships as a test of your creative ability, kindness and inner strength. When you focus on changing yourself rather than trying to change others, you set a valuable example for children.

Enjoy your family's uniqueness. Expect your stepfamily to be very different from a first-marriage family. A blended family is no better or worse than any other family, but it is unique. Learn to appreciate the advantages of your family and the strengths of each person in it.

Avoid blaming problems on the blended family. Kids will be kids and adults will occasionally be immature whether in a first-marriage family or a stepfamily.

The idea of perfect families who celebrate perfect holidays is a myth. All families struggle, and it's through these difficulties that we grow in understanding. Appreciate your family as a training ground for love. Discuss what is right in your family, and express appreciation for one another. Do it until it becomes a habit.

Maintain a sense of humor. All step-families go through hard times. It is tempting to bring the heaviness of the past into the present. Avoid this tendency. Focus on having fun, even if you must be a little outrageous. For youngsters and older folks, gloom disperses quickly when someone gets silly, breaks into a grin, or makes a funny comment.

Especially during the holiday season, blended family members need permission to let the past stay in the past and enjoy the present.

Celebrating Holidays With A Blended Family

Holidays can be challenging times for blended families. Unresolved feelings, bitterness, and mixed loyalties can sidetrack what should be a happy time. However, with some advance planning, flexibility, and creativity, your blended family can enjoy pleasant and enriching holiday celebrations.

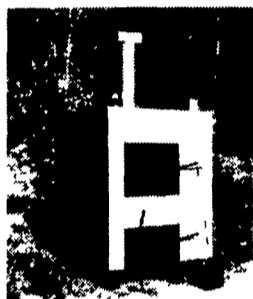
In a blended family, at least one adult has a child or children from a former relationship. These

children regularly visit or live with the couple. A blended family may be small, consisting of an adult couple and one child, or larger, perhaps consisting of her, his, and their children. Custody arrangements may result in the parent's building a family around full-time, shared, or weekend step-parenting. If your family is a blended family, consider the following suggestions that may help you manage the challenges of the holiday season.

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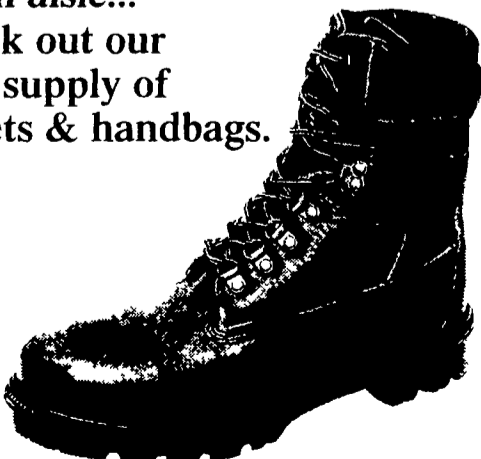
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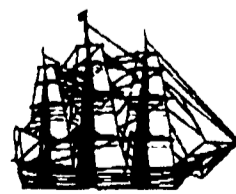
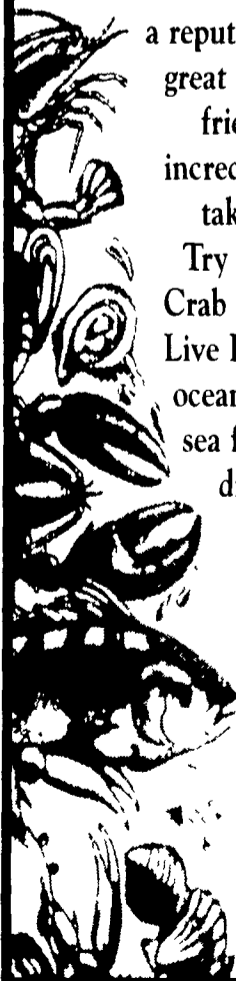
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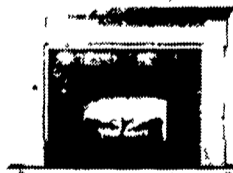


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