



I am recently divorced with two teenage children. How do split families make the holiday season special for their kids?

Holidays can be an especially difficult time for teens with divorced parents. There are often painful reminders of the past, or new and unfamiliar routines as kids spend time with a new step family. Parents may also try to provide an extra dose of holiday cheer and family togetherness to overcome their own personal guilt. Don't try to relive the past or over-compensate for the present, instead create a stress free holiday celebration.

Successful scheduling is the first step toward making wonderful new seasonal memories. Utilizing a collaborative approach, discuss wants and desires with your ex spouse and teens. Consider what events are important and map out their times and dates. Respect that teens may have special requests that involve both parents, such as a holiday sports tournament, or just one parent, like a long standing family tradition. This is not about negotiating the best deal; rather, it is about providing your kids with a joyous time of year.

Holidays are tricky times for divorced families. It can be troublesome for some parents knowing their teen is enjoying special moments with the other parent. Splitting an important day may make logical and logistical sense; however, a midway change can be disruptive to the celebratory spirit. Both teenagers and parents may find it difficult to enjoy the moment knowing in a few hours it will be time to interrupt the party and go to the other household.

Seasonal well wishes are important, but staying emotionally connected can be particularly difficult when physical proximity separates family members. Phone calls need to be full of good wishes and supportive in nature; telling teenagers that you miss them may create guilty feelings. Instead, ask about what your kids are doing and tell them to enjoy the day. Also make it a point to be with your loved ones. Teens will feel better knowing you are in a good place and have the support of caring company.

Lastly, think creatively. Talk with your ex to avoid duplicate purchases and consider splitting high ticket gift costs. Create a new tradition that provides for quality family time such as a special breakfast or an afternoon of ice skating. The goal is to have fresh experiences so old times will not be missed as much.

Parents typically spend hours shopping the stores and surfing the net for the ultimate holiday surprise. The best gift, however, is supportive parents that place a high priority on the emotional needs of their children. Presents become unfashionable or technologically outdated--memories never go out of style.