



Stepfamilies Tip Sheet: Christmas and Holidays



Surviving Christmas and other holidays

When we think of holidays, whether school holidays, Christmas or the long, hot summer... instead of relief and relaxation, it can be a hard time for parents, particularly step and blended families. The holidays can be a minefield.

With 1 in 5 Australians part of a stepfamily, interaction, negotiations and arrangements can get quite emotional. This is especially when dealing with new and old parents, partners and siblings – not to mention different cultures, religions and traditions, with increasingly timepoor families.

The following may help you to step up to a less stressful holiday season.

Christmas and other holidays are often about giving. Be prepared to 'give' a little and be realistic about your expectations. Remember that it is not always possible to please everyone, including yourself. You may have to divide up your holidays or your time with the children. It doesn't all have to be on the one day, suggest options and be open to later in the week or even in the New Year – it's the getting together, not the day that counts.



Spending time rather than spending money is what's important. The statement is self-explanatory, but at this time of year it can be easily forgotten. Presents are good but children do want happy, fun and calm times with their parents and their families. Remember children's experience of this time and their summer holidays is the very thing they commit to memory and recall as adults. **Make sure they are good memories and make the most of the time together.**



Honour the 'old' and Create the 'new'. Keep hold of some of the traditions or ways, particularly those that some family members hold important to them, but also start to create new traditions as stepfamily. See it as a good opportunity to 'cherry-pick' the best of your combined and collective family histories and experiences.

Time: Offer time, support and understanding, particularly for stepchildren and stepsiblings, acknowledging at first that they have no shared family histories. Don't pressure kids to feel or act in certain ways. Make the time special for all whatever it might look like.

No family is perfect. Despite manufactured media images of perfect families, no family (stepfamily or otherwise) is immune to holiday conflicts, divided loyalties and competition.

So, try to relax and enjoy what you can. All things pass – both the good and the bad – and knowing this can help keep you more in the moment, with an eye to the future.

Long-distance parenting can be hard

Make sure you plan ahead and have something positive for yourself to do on the day. You may not be able to be there with your children but plan your arrangements early and use technology to keep communication open and positive. Kids these days are happy to use phones, texts or email. It is not the same, but it is the next best thing and you will have something to share when you next see one another.

It is normal to find it tough

Know that it is normal for the early days and indeed years of stepfamily life to be tough: wrangling expectations, arrangements, schedules, clashing traditions and other people's expectations. If it is getting all too hard or a little bit of stress is becoming a lot of distress, it is important to seek help or get some advice early. It can be the most positive thing you can do for yourself and your children.

For further information go to:
www.stepfamily.org.au
www.ds.org.au

Where to access further help

Stepfamilies Australia
www.stepfamily.org.au

Family Relationships Advice Line
1800 050 321

Lifeline 13 11 14

Raising Children
www.raisingchildren.net.au

Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800 or
www.kidshelp.com.au