

Manage those details with a two-family Christmas

By JENNIFER COLTON

Less than half — about 46 percent — of children in the United States live in the traditional, nuclear home, meaning a home with two heterosexual parents in their first marriage. That means there's a good chance you're dealing with children who have a parent or other family member in another home. Navigating the holidays can be a challenge but can be an opportunity to strengthen family bonds and make new traditions.



When considering your holiday celebration, the first step is to communicate. Be clear about the plan — in advance — and make sure everyone is on the same page. Talk with the other half of your child's family about when the transition will be and what the days are.

Another area you should talk to the other home about — whether it's the second parent, grandparents or any other family — is the child's wish list. If the children have specific items they want for Christmas, talk with the other parent and family members about who will get the kids what. Some gifts may be appropriate to have at both homes — others may not. As with the celebration itself, steer clear of competing for who can get the best gift, the most gifts, or the most expensive gifts.

If possible, consider spending the holiday together. If it will result in conflict or hostility, skip this one, but if you can handle a few hours with your ex, it might be worth giving a try — have a joint gift-opening session or share the holiday meal. This

can take some of the strain off the children and let them enjoy both halves of their families together.

If, instead, one parent lives farther away and is not able to spend time with the children in the days around the holiday, take advantage of technology. Set aside a time for the kids to video chat with the absent parent, and, if you celebrate gift-giving, talk in advance about whether the children will open presents from the other parent on the holiday or if they'll hold off until they can be in person. For distance traveling, consider opening gifts with one parent on Christmas Day and with the other on New Years Day or even Three Kings Day — Jan. 6 — the traditional twelfth day of Christmas.

Splitting the holiday between two homes — or having two holiday celebrations on different days — can strain some traditions, so start making new ones. Whether you have the kids on Christmas Day or on a different day, find ways to make it spe-



Strategies

things or twists on classic ones. Just remember you don't have to create a whole new series of traditions at once — let them build over time.

Speaking of competition, remember that the holiday should never become one. Try not to worry about what the other family is doing or trying to make yours "better." Instead, focus on making sure your children have the holiday they deserve from you.

Jennifer Colton is news director of KOHU and KQFM, and mother of three, based in Pendleton.



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