

Don't Break The Bank (or Your Heart) This Holiday

Ten Gift Ideas For Stepfamilies

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While the holidays are a time of joy, children who live between two homes can find celebrating stressful. Where will I wake up Christmas morning? Will mom or dad be mad if I'm not with them? Why can't we celebrate our traditions as a family like we used to? These are just some of the questions that run through the hearts and minds of children whose parents are no longer together.

This year, keep in mind the pain and frustration holidays can trigger for your child/stepchild. Holidays can be even tougher if their other home isn't cooperating with you and your spouse in sharing time and celebrations. You can't control what they do but you can control how you allow it to impact you and your home. Give the children (regardless of age) the priceless gift of making their holiday as stress free as possible.

Consider these top ten gifts that pour into your relationship without draining your bank account:

1. **The gift of positive co-parenting and a peaceful holiday schedule.** Work out a schedule between the two homes in a peaceful and positive manner without the involvement of the kids. If you have to acquiesce on having the kids Christmas morning so they don't have to choose or be shuffled between two homes, do so gracefully. While it will be a painful decision, your children will appreciate and benefit from it.
2. **The gift of patience, grace and mercy.** Hurting people hurt others and often the holidays can trigger the worst in a child who is still dealing with the pain of their parents' divorce or the death of a parent. Extend patience, grace and mercy to your stepchild and extend it to your spouse and yourself as well.
3. **The gift of humor.** Have a sense of humor. If schedules change or things don't go as planned, try your best to look at the bright side and find humor.
4. **The gift of self-care.** Remember that self-care isn't selfish, it's survival. You can't take care of others if you are not taking care of yourself. Take a few minutes every day to do something that refreshes you. Devotions, reading a book, going for a walk, having a cup of coffee in peace are all ways to re-energize your body and soul.
5. **The gift of respecting their traditions.** When two families come together they bring two sets of family cultures and traditions to the marriage. Communicate with your spouse how you celebrate a holiday and understand how they and their kids have celebrated. Work to respect everyone's traditions. Children don't have to participate in the "other" family's traditions but they need to respect them.
6. **The gift of creating new family traditions.** Traditions create memories and can serve to bond a family together and create a unique identity. Think of some new traditions that you can do as a stepfamily.
7. **The gift of loving and respecting their parents.** Yes! Obviously, you love your spouse and it's important for the security of the marriage that you continue to nurture your spouse and your relationship. You also care about your stepkids and as hard as

it may be to do, you also need to respect the role of their other parent. You may not like this person. They may say toxic things about you that come from a place of pain and bitterness inside of them but you need to respect their position in your stepchild's life and not ever bad mouth them to the child. Children are wired to love their parents regardless of who they are. You will be seen in a positive light by your stepchildren if you accept and respect their role. (Note, you don't need to respect them as a person but you do need to respect that they are your stepchild's parent and not talk harshly about them to the kids.)

8. **The gift of no expectations.** This is a gift you give both your stepchild and yourself. Don't create unrealistic expectations for the holidays that stepfamily life simply can't live up to. And don't do things for your stepkids with an expectation in mind. If you buy all their gifts expecting a thank you and you don't get one, you will be devastated. Buy them gifts because YOU WANT TO not because you want to get thanked or hope it will bring you closer.
9. **The gift of unconditional love and acceptance.** Love and accept your stepchildren as is. You didn't raise them from birth, you can't control who they are or what they become. Love them for being your spouse's child and accept them without condition. Do set boundaries to protect against hurtful or dangerous behavior.
10. **The gift of secure and healthy marriage/partnership.** One of greatest gifts you can give the children is a secure foundation. While they may want their mom and dad together, understandings that you are a couple and are there for each other communicates stability, love and security to our children. Modeling a healthy relationship is a gift to our kids even if they don't say thank you. Children are more likely to follow what we do than what we say. Live your life the way you want your children and stepchildren to live.

Wishing you all a wonderful holiday season. Know and accept the fact that the holidays can be a time of joy and a time of stress for stepfamilies. The reality is that life is hard and sometimes the holidays can accentuate existing challenges like schedules and finances. Hold on to hope and press on without letting any potential toxic situations define you or your mood. You can do it and your children will be thankful for it.