

Healing Holiday Help for Stepmoms

“I feel bad for my kids and stepkids during the holidays,” Amber, a stepmom, explained. “They are shuffled between homes, unfamiliar traditions and stepfamily members. I can tell it’s stressful for them. I wish there was something I could do to make it easier.”

Amber is one smart stepmom. She recognizes the complexities and tension the holidays can stir in a stepfamily. Her desire to ease the strain is noble and compassionate.

Here are some ideas that can help:

Early Communication

There are two areas where Amber is responsible for communication. The sooner she has these discussions, the better it is for everyone. First, is with her former spouse, the father of her children. If at all possible, a calm discussion reviewing visitation times and places is crucial. The children should not enter this discussion; it should be conducted between two mature adults who care more about the children than they do about winning the day.

The second is with her own children, explaining the plans she and their father have decided upon.

Amber’s husband should be the one to have a discussion with his former spouse regarding the same subject. It’s not uncommon for a husband to put off the conversation with his ex-wife until the last minute. This is especially true if they have a tumultuous relationship. However, waiting only creates more tension as the children are uncertain about where they will wake up on Christmas morning.

If he refuses, it is still not her job to communicate with the former spouse. The only exception is when the biological parent and stepparent have already established guidelines regarding visitation.

Recognize reality

It's normal for a stepmom to desire "heavenly peace" during the holidays. However, sometimes that isn't possible. She must learn the things she can control and let go of the things she cannot. For example, if her husband's ex-spouse chooses to withhold the children or create chaos at the last minute, that is something she cannot control. Fighting, demanding and threatening typically do not resolve conflict.

Her job is to help her spouse clearly think through the options available. Assisting him with finding wise counsel, including legal help after the holidays are over, might be what is necessary.

Lower the Expectations

If there is a history of drama with certain family members, or a former spouse, assume and prepare for the fact that it's likely to happen again this year. Using the previous visitation scenario as an example, it's advisable for Amber and her spouse to have a conversation regarding how they will respond if the former spouse chooses the same actions this year.

Part of becoming a smart stepmom is learning how to be flexible. If the struggle over having the kids on Christmas day becomes so intense that it ruins everyone's holiday, including the children's, it might be advisable to have the celebration with them on a different day.

I'm not suggesting Amber and her husband become doormats. I am recommending that they work toward peace, even if it means sacrificing what they prefer for the sake of the children.

Keep the Main Thing the Main Thing

The goal for the holidays should not be focused on a price tag or the number of gifts received but rather, memories of a home filled with respect, compromise and tranquility. Amber can set the tone in her home by creating a warm atmosphere where her children and her stepchildren know they are loved. Even when former spouses attempt to disrupt the peace, it is possible, although not easy, for her to keep her eyes on the prize.

She will need to continuously ask herself, “When my children and stepchildren grow up, what memories do I want them to have about Christmas in our home? What is within my control to help these children have pleasant thoughts and experiences? Will they remember the night we laughed while baking cookies or the fight over who has them on Christmas Eve? “

Amber can’t control the actions of anyone else—not even her husband, should he choose to respond poorly. However, she can opt to look at the baby in the manger who knows more about rejection, being hated and discord than anyone else who has ever lived.

And He can give her a mind that’s at rest. It’s a promise.
{eoa}

Laura Petherbridge is an international speaker and published author of five books who has appeared in numerous publications, TV shows and radio productions. A featured expert on the DivorceCare DVD series, she has been married to Steve for 32 years and has two stepsons who gifted her with two grandchildren. Learn more at .