

blended families

At my son Jack's progressive preschool, his teachers have incorporated culture into the curriculum. Each child created a passport and they all "travel" to different countries when celebrating holidays (for Chinese New Year, for example, they'll "visit" China and learn all about that country). The teachers are also working with the kids and parents to create family trees. The goal is for the kids to learn more about their ancestors and to celebrate cultural differences.



As the holidays approach, celebrating what makes each child unique is important, especially since the number of blended families has increased. It could be a child that is adopted from another country, a family blended through remarriage or, in my family's case, children celebrating two religions.

I was raised Catholic, starting with my baptism and up through many years of Catholic school. As a big Catholic family—six kids—we embraced the religious holidays both as a time to celebrate and also as a way to give back (through the church, we participated in many toy and food drives).

I left the Midwest after college, moved to New York, and met a wonderful Jewish man who became my husband. I slowly began to learn about his religion, and now our family, with our two young boys, are regulars at Tot Shabbat services on Saturday. I often volunteer to be the Shabbat mom and lead the children in songs I did not grow up with, but have come to really cherish and love.

People often ask how we're going to raise our children. It's a question many blended families are asked. What some want to know is if we're going to embrace one religion over the other. We've decided that, for us, religion is about celebrating unique family traditions and spending quality time with extended relatives. At Hanukkah, Passover, and Yom Kippur we celebrate with my husband's family. My children know the songs and love the tradition of eating Matzah ball soup and hiding the afikomen with their Jewish cousins. At Christmas and Easter, we celebrate with my family, coloring Easter eggs and eating a big Christmas-morning breakfast after church.

As blended families become more of the norm, each individual family will decide which traditions to embrace, which stories to share, and what songs to sing. For my boys, singing "Jingle Bells" and "Dreidel, Dreidel, Dreidel" is not uncommon. They are surrounded by two extended families that, while from different religions, have unlimited amounts of love to share. For that, I consider myself truly lucky and blessed each holiday season.

P.S.

How do you incorporate different traditions into your family festivities? Let us know on Facebook!

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