

The perfect BLEND



Growing up in Britain in the 1960s, Wendy Board had a pretty traditional English girl's life. Public schools, Anglican background, church every Sunday. So when she married a nice Jewish boy from Toronto, their two very different upbringings clashed... right? Wrong.

In fact, four kids and 29 years of marriage later, the couple stands as a shining example

of how compromise and acceptance can make for peace in a household – even one where the two parents come from very different backgrounds.

“We raised the kids as both,” says Richard Fogel, Wendy's husband. If anything the couple noticed more cultural than religious differences. “That first Christmas when Wendy expected me to put up a tree, I said no at

first!” He soon eased up and now even enjoys helping with the tree.

Jennifer Kolari is a Toronto-based family therapist and the founder of Connected Parenting, an approach that teaches parents the techniques therapists use to change undesirable behaviours.

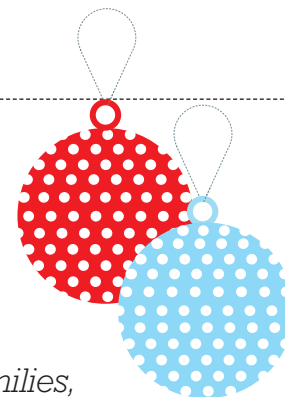
“I think it's beautiful to be blended,” says Jennifer. In fact in her own household that combines Judaism and Christianity, they joke that they celebrate “Chrismukkah”!

If there are members of the extended family that have trouble embracing your new blended traditions, Jennifer advises setting boundaries to protect your kids. For example, don't have religious debates during the holidays, or in front of the kids.

In her practice, Jennifer sees lots of families blending cultural traditions, and has some tips for those looking for holiday harmony:

1 Remember that kids are open-minded. They are exposed to different things everyday – whether it's music, TV or other forms of pop culture – so by nature they are receptive. It's when the adults get uptight about things that it can create a problem for the kids.

2 Don't have a favourite holiday. This can be tough, because most of us do have a favourite. Jennifer says even if we're not vocal about it, kids sense these things. Try to be neutral about different holidays throughout the year.



For many Canadian families, multiculturalism starts at home with a mix of winter traditions and celebrations.

Want to learn more?
Watch Jennifer Kolari at
ParentsCanada.com/momsense.

3 Be sensitive around Christmas. As the most commercial and ubiquitous of the holidays, it's easy to get caught up in Christmas. In a household that celebrates Christmas plus other traditions, it's important to be aware of this. Try to balance Christmas with other holidays.

4 Make your own traditions. Initiate a new tradition that's unique to your family, such as a special meal or evening where everyone gathers and names what they are thankful for. This can become an event that everybody looks forward to.

5 Throw yourself into the other person's holiday. Even if the celebrations are foreign to you and not something you grew up with, show your kids and your spouse that both holidays can be enjoyed with no guilt. Learning as much as you can about your spouse's traditions can help avoid awkward situations.



Moms Andrea and Lianne cofounded WhereParentsTalk.com and co-host *Parents Talk* on Rogers TV. Together they have produced several award-winning parenting DVDs and web videos.

Kath Beake