HOLIDAY GIFTING CAN BE VEXING FOR KIDS OF DIVORCE

By LEANNE ITALIE — Dec. 23, 2013 3:14 PM EST

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In this June 2012 photo provided by Edwin Lyngar, from left, the Lyngar family, Reagan, 6, Abby, 13, Edwin, 40, Joy, 44, Ellie, 4, and John Zaleschuk, 17, pose at the graduation party for their son, Eddie Lyngar, 19, in cap and gown, in Reno, Nev. Lyngar's eldest son is now in the Air Force and won't make it home for Christmas, but "Santa" will arrive Christmas Day with more presents for the little ones. "You have people moving in and moving out., said Lyngar. "You try to have one day when everyone's together. Whether it's two weeks before or two weeks after, it doesn't matter. That's Christmas." (AP Photo/Courtesy Edwin Lyngar, Cheryl Lyngar)

NEW YORK (AP) — Tomi Tuel remembers a particularly vexing Christmas after her divorce. Her two kids received an Xbox as a gift and hauled it from home to home when it came time to visit their dad.

"It was a complete hassle," she said. "All the cords got unplugged and rolled up and transported along with the games. Of course parts would be left or games wanted would be left behind."

So the siblings took matters into their own hands, working and saving enough in Christmas and birthday money to buy a second one, said the Folsom, Calif., mom.

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Divorce can be challenging at the holidays under the most amicable of circumstances, and gifts sometimes add another layer of frustration — for young and old.

Edwin Lyngar in Reno, Nev., has two kids from his first marriage. From his second he has two more kids and one stepson. Usually, he and his ex coordinate gifts for their two, but he recalls an unauthorized electric piano one year when his daughter, now 13, was about 5.

"Because I have primary custody, all of the presents end up at my house, and there are some really heinous things that I wish could stay." Stay at his ex's house, that is. "They're loud or annoying, but we try."

Whether gift goofs are accidental or on purpose, a little planning can go a long way, said family law attorney Alan Plevy in suburban Washington, D.C. At the top of his wish list for such families: Avoid gifting competition.

"The recession has made it difficult for some. Suddenly a task shared by two now falls on each parent. Work together so one parent doesn't 'outgift' the other," Plevy said.

And if a child gets a long-wanted treasure, don't put limits on it, "such as 'I gave you this gift so you can only use it at my house.' Children value peace over presents and they don't care about which parent gives them the most or the biggest gifts," he said.

Plevy's law partner, Kathryn Dickerson, said pleasing the kids come gift time without considering the ex can make a painful situation worse.

"The children show up at the custodial parent's house, where they're living most of the time, with a puppy," she said. If that parent had wanted a puppy, she says, "they would have gotten one."

Jeff Goldberg has been divorced for about seven years and has three kids — 11-year-old twins and a 12-year-old. The subject of where their gifts live has come up with his ex, said the Long Beach, N.Y., dad.

"I have a smaller house than she does so I like to get everything out of here," Goldberg said. "However, whenever we show up with anything, whether it's the holidays or not, it's like, 'Oh no, take that back home. If you bought it, it's staying with you.'"

For Goldberg, who has one spare room for all three kids, it's a matter of storage. "I'm kind of a neat freak so if I can't put it away somewhere, I'd rather not have it," he said.

Things have slowly worked themselves out, though, and now he realizes that having more stuff for the kids to call their own at his place gives them something to look forward to when they visit, usually every other weekend.

Tuel's kids are now 17 and 21 and estranged from their father, but when regular visits were a part of their lives, "My general rule was if it could fit in the car they could take it."

At the holidays, especially, there was no way around the stress of

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At the holidays, especially, there was no way around the stress of moving the kids and their stuff from house to house, she said. Tuel said the kids came to her for Christmas Eve and her former husband picked them up Christmas Day, with a gift haul at each location.

"I used to make them make a checklist to take with them and stuff it in their backpacks so they would remember to gather everything they took," she said. A lot of toys would get lost and misplaced, she said.

Lyngar has been divorced for 10 years and called the holiday for his kids a "cluster Christmas," also involving separate gift hauls and sometimes rides on airplanes. Because his ex now lives in a faraway state, leaving treasured gifts behind would mean his 13-year-old daughter might not see them for months.

For his two youngest, ages 4 and 6, Christmas comes twice — this year on Dec. 14 first, before older siblings head out for other family visits and commitments, then again on Christmas Day.

"It's just a huge chess game," he said. "You have people moving in and moving out. You try to have one day when everyone's together. Whether it's two weeks before or two weeks after, it doesn't matter. That's Christmas."

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