

10 Tips for Co-Parenting Through the Holidays - *Client Newsletter*

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(1) **Consider your children's needs first and foremost.** This is #1 on the list for a reason. Everyone has expectations in celebrating the holidays. Shared parenting time during the festivities can result in frustrated expectations if the schedule doesn't coincide with your desired plans. At those moments of frustration, it's important to remember what is best for your children (i.e., sharing time with both parents and families/friends) and to be patient in adapting to a new means of celebrating. If you put your children first and they're ok, you'll likely find that you will be too.

(2) **Communicate with your co-parent in advance of the season and include him/her in the planning stage.** Communication, communication, communication. Shared parenting requires regular shared communication with your co-parent, especially during the holidays when the routine may change. Open, positive communication early in the planning will reduce the potential for misunderstandings and fosters opportunity to discuss each person's goals and expectations.

(3) **Ask your children about how they feel and how they like to celebrate.** Offering your children the opportunity to provide input will validate their feelings and help to ensure that you're able to put their needs first. This is not to say that they should make demands or that you should place them in the middle of conflict. Rather, simply talk to them about their feelings and try to understand their likes, dislikes and levels of comfort.

(4) **Remember that changes in tradition bring opportunity for new ways to celebrate.** Tradition abounds during the holiday season. While it's nice to continue family traditions post-divorce or during separation, it's not always easy to accomplish. If one tradition isn't going to work,

use the opportunity to begin a new and fun tradition.

(5) **Adapt when necessary.** The holidays can be chaotic despite open communication and advanced planning. As challenges arise, remember that it's a season to enjoy and adapt to the situation as best you can. Control over the details is not worth your peace. Or the peace of your children and family.

(6) **Do not compete with your co-parent.** Divorce and separation can breed insecurity, fear and competition in parenting. The desire to be enough and to prove your worth to your children and family may be tempting. Will your former spouse have greater financial resources to buy more expensive gifts? Does he or she corner the market on preparing your children's favorite holiday meal or dessert? Is your child's favorite aunt, uncle or cousin on your former-in-law's side? The potential to worry is endless—and fruitless. The vast majority of the time, the issue you're worrying about never comes to light. Try to be confident in the special relationship you have with your children and use the holidays as a time to continue to build your own meaningful memories with them.

(7) **Be an example of kindness and respect — for your co-parent and your children.** The holidays are a key occasion to lead by example. If you're flexible, maybe your former spouse will appreciate your flexibility and mirror the behavior. If you're peaceful and positive, your children and those around you will take note and perhaps emulate your positive outlook. When all else fails, be kind. To yourself, to your family, to your former spouse. Eventually, kindness will be contagious. And if it's not, you can enjoy the peace of knowing that you've been kind and remained positive in the face of adversity.

(8) **Take a moment to grieve, if necessary, and then identify an activity that brings you joy and do it.** Divorce and separation can leave you feeling lonely or grieving an image of family and tradition you once enjoyed. Grief is normal. Embrace it, give yourself time to feel sad if necessary, and then find an activity to help you move through that feeling. Exercise, cooking, and sharing time with family and friends are all good options. Let grief visit if she chooses, but don't embrace her so warmly that she stays through the holidays.

(9) **Eat, sleep, exercise and take care of yourself.** The holidays are packed with hectic schedules and pressure to entertain, shop, travel, etc. It is difficult to be your best self if you're tired, run down, hungry or sick. Take care of yourself so that you're able to enjoy the season with all the hustle and bustle it brings.

(10) **Remember that every day is a new beginning.** If you've had a bad day (or if someone close to you has had a bad day), remember that tomorrow is a new day. Try again. This holds true 365 days of the year, but most especially as you adjust to life after separation or divorce during the holidays. It's an imperfect process and we're imperfect people. Gratefully, tomorrow is another day to do and feel better. Happy Holidays!