

## Holidays After Divorce

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Holidays after divorce can be difficult, stressful and challenging for parents and children to face. Holidays may bring some old memories that can even make everyone feel hurt, sad, angry, disappointed and create mixed emotions.

When parents divorce, everyone in the family will need to make holiday adjustments. Whether children will adjust well or not to the holiday visitation schedule depends on how well their parents adjust to their new roles. In order to make the best of holiday seasons for their children and themselves, both parents need to plan ahead to avoid scheduling conflicts, arguments or misunderstandings.

The following are some suggestions to help establish lasting memories for your children and yourself:

- ◆ **Make detailed plans** to avoid confusion and help both parents and children know what to expect. Make sure your children know where they will be spending the holiday. If changes need to be made, discuss with the other parent early.
- ◆ **Create holiday traditions** with your children. If children are not with you for a holiday, find positive ways to enjoy the holidays.
- ◆ **Avoid using holidays** to compete with the other parent. Focus on your children's needs and set realistic expectations.
- ◆ **Teach your children** the meaning of holiday giving and sharing. Buying expensive gifts is not a way to get your children's love. The best gifts children need from parents are time, attention, unconditional love and emotional presence.
- ◆ **Communicate** with the other parent openly. If your parenting plan doesn't spell out clearly who will take the children on which holiday, work together well in advance to make holiday plans. If you have more than two children, don't split them up. Letting them be together can help them feel secure and connected.
- ◆ **Be aware** of your children's feelings and encourage them to express and talk about their feelings.
- ◆ **Take care** of yourself emotionally and physically. You need to develop a good support system and put your past behind to be able to have joyful and fulfilling holidays.



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## Spending a Holiday Alone

If your children are with the other parent for a holiday, it can be devastating for you to be alone and separated from your children for the first time. Being single with no children around to adjust to the holidays can also be stressful. Planning ahead can help you decide what you really want to do for a holiday without your children. If you wait until the last minute, you may have a hard time enjoying a meaningful holiday—unless you prefer to be alone.

Check around your community calendars to see if there are special holiday events in which you might be interested. You need to make an effort to get involved. For instance get involved in church projects or community events, get together with friends, volunteer to help others, visit a place that you have dreamed of for a long time, take a trip, etc.

If you still have a lot of time alone, find things that can make you feel happy, relaxed, and peaceful. For example, listen to music, do your house project or hobbies, take a walk, read a book that you enjoy, watch a movie, start a craft project or new hobby, cook a special holiday meal, do relaxation exercises, etc. Take positive approaches and enjoy the special time for yourself.

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## Tips on Spending Holidays with Children

- ◆ **Plan ahead.** Think about things that your children would enjoy doing together during a holiday. Have a family meeting to discuss a holiday plan and let them be involved in the plan. Making a holiday plan together helps children feel confident, secure, and loved. Be creative, open, and flexible to establish traditions with your children.
- ◆ **Provide routine schedules.** Children need consistent schedules even in a holiday season. If it is impossible to keep a routine schedule during a holiday, tell your children the change and what to expect ahead of time. Don't schedule too many activities to overwhelm your children.
- ◆ **Allow children to talk** about past holidays and encourage them to share their feelings and memories.
- ◆ **Keep a holiday simple and meaningful.** For instance, have children help with decorations, make holiday meals, visit extended families, etc. Help children find a church or community project that you all could do together to share the joy of holidays with people in homeless shelters, nursing homes, hospitals, or foster homes.
- ◆ **Give your children reassurance.** Children may feel guilty when they spend a holiday with only one parent. Help them make contacts with the other parent by phone, e-mail, cards, letters, etc.



### Additional Resources:

Stepfamilies and Holidays...<http://www.stepfamilyboston.com/holidays.htm>

Missourifamilies.....<http://www.missourifamilies.org/divorce/index.htm>