







The Parent's Corner

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DIVORCE/SEPARATION AND THE HOLIDAYS

November/December 2021

The holidays are meant to be a time of joy and togetherness, right? At least, that's what we're told and what we hope for. But, what if your family feels like it's falling apart? Divorce and separation, whether recent or not, can create unwanted stress during the holiday season for yourself and your children. You may wonder where the kids will spend their holidays, how to split time, how to break the news that some of their beloved traditions may not happen as they did in the past. Navigating the holidays while co-parenting is hard, and we want to note some tips shared by Kids In The Middle on how to make this transition easier.

-  **Try to figure out schedules as far in advance as you can.** If you have split custody with your co-parent, be sure to check and see what the schedule is regarding time spent for holidays. Holiday visitation rules trump any regular visitation schedules. Planning ahead of time will diminish possible arguments and dysfunction that may come up last-minute.
-  **Keep things as "normal" as possible.** If you know that your child normally spends a specific day with your co-parent's family and certain relatives will be out of town the rest of the week, try to schedule time in which your child can see them.
-  **Consider sharing the holidays together.** Of course, this will depend on your relationship with your co-parent. Some families are amicable and thus spending the holidays together may be the best choice for their family, especially with young children and when the separation is recent. There are pros and cons to this choice; On the positive side, both parents get to see the child on the actual holiday, there is less disruption to the child's routine, and more of a hopeful outlook that the family can continue to get along post-separation or divorce. On the other hand, if you believe there is the possibility of noticeable tension, arguments, or discomfort for your child, you should stray from this idea. Additionally, if one or both parents has remarried, this may create more tension for the child and yourself. It is always best to choose what is in the best interest of the child. Parents who are together and fighting on a holiday will likely be a more harmful memory for your child than spending the holiday apart.
-  **Coordinate gifts and shopping.** It is important to talk with your co-parent about expectations regarding gifts during the holidays to reduce the chance of one parent purchasing 3/4 of the child's wishlist items and the other parent feeling they cannot match this. Work together to pitch in money for bigger items, or to communicate who is buying what and the budget for each parent. Helping your child purchase a gift for your co-parent may also be beneficial for the child, even if you are not on good terms.
-  **Make new celebrations and traditions.** Family changes may mean you are not with your child to bake together on Thanksgiving day, watch them run downstairs on Christmas morning, or watch the ball drop at midnight on New Year's Eve. Depending on your schedule with your co-parent, you may get to see your child the following weekend or another day of the week. If this is the case, all is not lost -- plan new traditions and celebrations for the day(s) you get with them. View it as an extended holiday, which your child may even enjoy!
-  **Practice self-care.** Every family is different, and there are many times that separation is not mutual. You may be feeling a great sense of loss and longing for the togetherness you once had during the holidays. Despite these new changes in routine, make sure to do things with this added alone time and understand that you may have to take care of yourself. Spend time catching up on a book you've not had the time to read, plan a day with friends, or spend time with your family. It is okay to be unhappy with the situation, but also important to be your best self when you do get to spend time with your child, as this is what they will remember the most.

As always, we are always in your corner if you need extra support!