

The Divorced Parent Holiday Challenges



EVERY YEAR AROUND THIS TIME, I SEE MY CLIENTS STRESSED OUT AND sad because the holidays are around the corner. It's Halloween with costumes and trick-or-treating, Thanksgiving and how to plan double dinners; and Christmas and Hanukkah with gift giving. What used to be a joyous time of year has turned into an "I just can't wait to get through it" time of year. I get it, as I have been there myself, but I am also going to tell you, if you approach the holidays with a different attitude and a plan, believe it or not, you can actually not just get through it but enjoy the season. So, let's give it some thought now.

First, there is the issue of two households. Communication between you and your ex is just as important as between you and your children. Try to work out a holiday schedule that works for the children so they can spend equal time with both parents. Depending on their ages, involve them in holiday decisions, as it's about what is important for them. Take the time to listen to what they are saying and their feelings, especially if this is the first holiday as a separated family.

Now, let's talk about presents, as this is a minefield to navigate. Children want to give and please, so try (key word) not to take it personally when they come to you and ask for money to buy your ex's girlfriend/boyfriend a present. A huge pill to swallow, I know, and depending on the age, it can be handled a couple of ways. If the child is older, you can explain to him or her that now that you are divorced, you will pay for presents on your side and that their dad will pay for presents on his side. If the child is young, well, that's a bullet you will have to take. Putting your children's feelings first just might be the best present you can give yourself.

If certain traditions were a part of your married life, there is no reason you shouldn't continue with them. Children need consistency, and if they look forward to these things but it upsets you, then change them up a bit and start new ones as well.

Next on the agenda is you. Being without your children during the holidays when you have been used to having them for all the festivities is gut-wrenching to think about, but times have changed and you need to change with them. The more you fight this change, the harder it will be — so acceptance and planning is key. This is a transition for everyone, so give it some clear thought not based on raw emotion.

Have a plan in place as to what you will do during the times that the children are at your ex's. Don't wait until the front door shuts behind your children and you're in tears to figure out what you are going to do. Now is the perfect time to pamper yourself, and you can do it guilt-free, as you will not feel like you are taking time away from your children. On another note, you can't stifle your emotions, but don't show your tears in front of the children. Let them enjoy the holidays and don't feel guilty about spending time with the other parent. Prepare yourself to hear about the other's home and what they did and the presents they received. Smile as you pour yourself a glass of wine.

Be in the present moment, literally. Do not allow your mind to wander to past holidays or what was. Be in the moment and find something to be grateful for in that moment. Don't focus on the fact that you are alone or that your children are at your ex's. Focus on what you have planned out for yourself and focus on the new year and the new opportunities that await you.



Happy Holidays



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