



FAMILY *Matters*

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How to Handle the Holidays after Divorce

The fall and winter holidays can be a wonderful time for family connection and closeness. When couples divorce, family dynamics may complicate matters which can create a potentially stressful time. In my practice, I hear wonderful stories about how families of divorce accommodate to the various schedules and holiday demands in a cooperative way. This helps children manage the usual stress of the holidays and helps to create positive holiday memories.

However, I do hear about high conflict divorce situations where schedules and holiday demands are not managed with the best interest of the children in mind. Parents and families may argue about schedules and pick up times despite having divorce agreements that specifically address this. Unfortunately, children often feel caught in the middle of such conflicts. This creates high stress and conflicts about mixed loyalties. Mixed loyalties come about when children are put in a position of which parent to potentially side with. This is especially true when one parent may put pres-

sure on a child to agree with their request. How can a child give an honest answer without the fear of displeasing the other parent? In some cases, I have seen one or both parents actively “bad mouth” the other parent in an attempt to secure what they want which is stressful for most children.

What parents can do to make the holidays a pleasant experience for all.

- Review your current divorce agreement to be sure to follow it as agreed upon.
- Discuss any scheduling and pick up time conflicts away from the children.
- Once the schedule is agreed upon, inform the children so they know what to expect.
- Do not argue in front of the children about holiday conflicts.
- Keep up your children’s favorite holiday traditions
- Develop new holiday traditions for the new fam-

ily configuration.

- Create win-win experiences where everyone gets their needs met, most importantly, the children.
- Don’t compare or evaluate gatherings with your ex-spouse.
- Encourage you children to share openly about their experiences with your ex-spouse without judgement or comparison.
- Take plenty of pictures to preserve the happy memories.
- Don’t compete with your ex-spouse to outdo one another.
- Let go of things that you can’t control, such as your ex-spouse.
- Encourage and help your children obtain holiday appropriate gifts for your ex-spouse as this conveys support and respect for your ex-spouse.
- Focus on the happy memories you want to create during the holidays and act accordingly.
- Act with the best interest of the children in mind.

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