



Post-divorce Christmas: Blended Families, Harmonious Holidays

For most families the holiday season is a time of joy, but also stress and pressure. The stress in turn can lead to tense relationships or even out-and-out conflict among family members. For families affected by divorce, that tension is multiplied, and children often become the unwitting pawns in their parents' battles. But some divorced parents find ways to rise above their past difficulties and work together (or even celebrate together!) in order to create for themselves and their children a holiday filled with peace and good will. What are the pitfalls for divorced parents or blended families to watch out for during the holidays? And what can parents do to keep their children's wellbeing in mind and let the true holiday spirit prevail?

I. Underlying issues

- Holidays are loaded with meaning and thus may magnify problems and emotions
- Power struggles often ensue between parents regarding time, place and logistics
- Competition between parents to be the "good parent," often expressed in terms of who gives the bigger gifts – after a certain age, children may capitalize on this and play one parent against the other
- It may be tempting to mock or undermine the other parent's family customs and behavior
- When remarriage has occurred, issues are compounded by presence of step-parents, step- or half-siblings, and additional extended family – feelings of jealousy, anger, or sadness may consume a parent and make it hard to focus on children's needs

II. Tips for parents

- Keep your eye on the goal: your child growing up well
Research shows children do best when parents work together as co-parents even after divorce. Holidays are a real test of that ability.
- Plan gift-giving together and, if possible, give gifts jointly
- Keep your criticism of the other parent and family to yourself
- Avoid using the child to "spy" on your ex-spouse
- Affirm your child's relationship with the other parent and family
"Your dad [and stepmom, grandparents, etc.] really love you and are excited to have you with them" and/or "Let's write a thank you note to your dad and ----- to tell them what a nice time you had."