

# 10 Ways for Divorcing Families to Enjoy the Holidays

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All families experience additional stress during celebrations and holidays, but divorced families can be pushed to the limit. We are headed into a time when everyone is expected to be happy and full of good cheer, and maybe your heart is in shreds, the kids are fighting, and you are flat broke.

Restructuring a family in even in the most amicable divorce is not easy. Roles are altered; traditions change, and parents will spend important celebrations and holidays without their children. Here are 10 ideas to help you enjoy the holidays.

1. **Agree on the schedule well in advance.** Some typical ways that families who celebrate Christian holidays, divide their parenting time:
  - The children spend Thanksgiving with one parent and Christmas with the other, then switch the following year.
  - The children spend the first half of winter break, through Christmas Eve with one parent, then go to the other parent's house on Christmas morning, through the end of winter break. The schedule may be switched the following year, or not.
  - The children have Christmas morning at one parent's house and afternoon at the other.
  - Parents get together to open presents or have Thanksgiving dinner together.

2. **Set the tone for your children.** If you complain about having less money for presents, and approach the holidays with dread, or anger at your ex, your children will take your cue and join you in having a miserable time. If instead, you make homemade gifts together, and try new activities, you are more likely to have fun. This can be a time to develop special traditions in each household that everyone can look forward to from year to year.

3. **If there is conflict, it is very important to keep it away from the children.** Fighting over who has the children, will not bring holiday joy to anyone. As three young girls once said, "Christmas and birthdays used to be fun. They are really awful since Mom and Dad started to fight over who gets to have us. We don't care where we spend Christmas, we just want the fighting to stop."<sup>1</sup> If you can't figure it out yourselves, go see a third party-- a minister, a trusted relative or a mediator.

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4. **Don't shower your children with presents.** Buying more gifts doesn't prove that you are a good parent, make guilt go away, or show that you love the children best. Two wise parents I know,

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<sup>1</sup> "Three Young Girls" in Parents Corner at <http://www.uptoparents.org/lifejackets.cfm>

nipped competition and comparisons in the bud by deciding that all presents would be from both parents. If you can't keep up with your ex's spending, do creative projects with your children—bake cookies, make presents or go on inexpensive excursions. If you can't do it all—don't. Delegate holiday projects to friends, family and your co-parent.

### If you can't do it all---don't.

5. **Plan what to do with alone time.** Reach out to family and friends for support. Volunteer. Enjoy your religious traditions. Invite single friends to do something new. Be active—go skiing or hiking. Take in a good comedy.
6. **Don't overindulge.** Holidays are by definition, a time of overindulgence, however, if you drink too much, overspend your budget, or commit more time and energy than you have, you will pay for it later. Decide beforehand if it is going to be worth it. Make a plan for if you are asked to commit to more than you can handle.
7. **Have part of a celebration in each home, rather than trying to orchestrate multiple events.** Imagine being shuffled from home to home for a full Thanksgiving meal with Mom, with Dad, and the grandparents too. It has happened. And that person as an adult, never eats turkey. Since children can take only so much stimulation before a melt down, some divorced parents get together to open presents

with the children. Others spread things out by opening one present each evening.

8. **Lower your expectations.** Sometimes we expect more from a holiday than is possible to experience. Remember that the only perfect families are on TV.
9. **Combine traditions and make the holidays uniquely yours.** Remarried parents may have a number of traditions living under one roof in a blended family. Enlist the children's help to plan a new family celebration, combining traditions from all sides of the family.

### The only perfect families are on TV.

10. Psychotherapist, Jill Curtis reminds us, that “**what suits one family will not feel right for another.** The important thing to keep in mind is that all the members who make up ‘a family’ will have a point of view about the holiday. Talk about it, don't assume anything, and sometimes by taking a back seat and not insisting on ‘turkey and all the trimmings on the day’ or even the following day, will bring about lasting gratitude from those who feel so caught in the middle of family strife. Remember there are 364 other days in the year.”<sup>2</sup>

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<http://www.family2000.org.uk/holiday%20season.htm>

