

Divorced? Avoid Holiday Children Tug-of-War

Updated: Thursday, 01 Dec 2011, 2:46 PM CST
Published : Thursday, 01 Dec 2011, 2:46 PM CST

The end of a marriage is never pleasant, especially when children are involved. For most divorced couples with children, they have to learn how to deal with a “divided” family. That means “divided” holidays too. That can leave one or both parents feeling anxious, scared and sometimes down-right angry.

It can be hard to imagine spending holidays, birthdays and family traditions away from your children. Here are some helpful tips for trying to do it right. Realize this will likely take some practice before it feels comfortable, because you can only control your end of the negotiating.

1. Plan Ahead As Early As Possible & Don't Commit Until You've Both Talked

Schedule a meeting (try to do this in-person if possible) at a neutral place and try to have a civil conversation about what you'd both prefer for the holidays. If you can create an agenda well ahead of time, you (and potentially your children) won't have to experience anxiety during the holidays – because you'll already know who's going where.

2. Don't Ask The Kids Where They Want To Go

Making decisions about the holidays should be made by you, the parents! Your kids will always try to please you so asking them just isn't fair, and it forces them to choose one of you over the other. If you're amicable with your ex, and live close by, perhaps you can divide the day so the kids can experience both families for each holiday. Otherwise, try alternating years and make out a schedule for several years to come.

3. Be OK With Making New Traditions

Just because you're a divided family, doesn't mean you can't make new traditions. Try not to take it personally if your ex starts a new tradition with your children, and you feel left out. It's important for your children and their other parent to connect in ways that matter during the holidays. Even if you feel some spite or anger from the other side, be happy for your children that they enjoyed themselves and that they're making new lifelong memories.

4. Think About What Your Children Are Feeling & What Makes Them Happy During The Holidays

It's important to look at divorce through your children's eyes. When you get a divorce as the parents, you have the option to move on, to create a new life, marriage and/or family for yourself. Children don't have that luxury. They will always have divorced parents, even when they're 40, and will always try to please you both, no matter how you feel about one another. So, try to work with your ex to create the happiest holiday possible for your children. Try your hardest to put aside hurt feelings so when you look back, you can be proud that you did everything possible to give your children happy holiday memories.