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NAVIGATING THE HOLIDAYS AS A SEPARATED OR NEWLY DIVORCED PARENT: A SURVIVAL GUIDE

By Christopher R. Castellano, Esq.

The holiday season is a time for joy, togetherness and making cherished memories with loved ones. However, [for parents who are separated or newly divorced](#), it can be a challenging and emotionally charged period. Coping with changes in family dynamics and ensuring that your children have a positive experience during the holidays can be a daunting task. As a family law attorney, I've witnessed many parents successfully navigate these turbulent waters. Here are some strategies to help you and your family survive and thrive throughout the holidays.

Communication is Key

Effective communication is the cornerstone of successful co-parenting at any point during the year. The need for effective communication is even more

pronounced during the holidays. If you have an existing agreement, reread your holiday plan and understand what your arrangement entails. If you do not have a holiday plan in place, scheduling the season well in advance with the aim of establishing a clear and mutually agreeable holiday schedule with the other custodial parent is a necessity. You should be mindful to discuss arrangements for where the children will spend each holiday, travel plans and parameters around gift-giving. [Open and respectful communication](#) can prevent misunderstandings and reduce stress during the holiday season.

Keep the Children's Best Interests in Mind

Your children's needs and well-being should be at the forefront of your holiday

plans. Avoid engaging in conflicts or disputes with the other custodial parent or about the other parent during family gatherings or celebrations. Instead, focus on creating a positive, harmonious environment for your children to enjoy the holidays. [Children can feel particularly torn between their parents during this time](#), so be flexible and accommodating when it comes to their wishes.

Create New Traditions

The end of a marriage can be an opportunity to create new holiday traditions that reflect your family's unique circumstances. [Involve your children in brainstorming ideas for special activities or rituals that can become part of your new family tradition](#). This not only helps create a sense of stability but also provides a fresh

start during the holidays. However, be sure to avoid creating new traditions that would conflict with the other custodial parent's existing traditions or parenting time as this could cause significant turmoil.

Be Prepared for Emotional Moments

It's entirely natural to feel emotional during the holidays, especially if it's your first time celebrating as a separated or newly divorced parent. Be prepared for moments of nostalgia or loneliness. This is when a strong support system is important, so reach out to friends, family or a [therapist](#) to help you process your emotions.

Consider the Children's Perspectives

Be attentive to any signs of sadness, confusion or frustration that your children may exhibit during the holiday season. Encourage them to express their thoughts and feelings and reassure them that both parents love and support them.

Respect Your Ex-Spouse

While it may be challenging, showing respect and courtesy to your ex sets a positive example for your children and may alleviate some of your children's emotions. Avoid making negative comments or criticizing your former partner in front of the kids. [Maintaining a cordial relationship can help you co-parent](#) more effectively, especially during the holiday season.

Understand Your Limits

The holidays can be demanding, and [it's essential to prioritize your physical and emotional well-being](#). It may be tempting to respond to such a significant life change by hosting large family gatherings, but the increased stress of planning a gathering will likely outweigh the benefit of using a gathering as a distraction. Make time for relaxation, engage in fun activities, and connect with supportive friends and family to help recharge.

Conclusion

Surviving the holidays as a separated or newly divorced parent is undoubtedly challenging, but it's not impossible. By fostering open communication, putting your children's interests first, creating new traditions and maintaining respect for your

ex-spouse, you can navigate this holiday season successfully. Speaking with an experienced family law attorney is a great way to start planning for the upcoming holiday season and answering any questions you may have about any existing holiday plan you have or recommendations on how to create a plan. Remember, your children can still have memorable holidays and

your effort to provide them with a positive experience will be invaluable.

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