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A Divided Christmas – managing Christmas after separation

After parents separate one thing that everyone discovers is that special occasions and family celebrations are some of the most difficult times to deal with. The first Christmas after separation is the hardest and as parents struggle to manage their emotions, children and teens will also have concerns about spending Christmas without their other parent.

Christmas is a time when people are more aware of how things used to be and how much has changed. It takes effort and willingness to cooperate at these times when things are not the same or are not how you want them to be. Children and teens will also experience these feelings and giving them an opportunity to talk about this is helpful. Having a positive attitude will help your children in working towards keeping some traditions and being creative with new ideas.

Make a plan:

Putting a plan in place for the Christmas holidays, well ahead of time, can make a difference.

One teenager commented to me about Christmas *“Both my parents want me to please them by agreeing to do things their way. It puts me in a battle that I can never win.”*

Having a plan for Christmas where children know where they will be and when they will see or have time with their other parent is so important and helps everyone feel more in control. Without knowing or having a plan children and teens are left feeling anxious and upset. Just because they are not talking about it to you as their parent does not mean that it is not very much in their minds. If you have teenagers then include them in a

planning discussion. Everyone's opinion is valid and while compromises will need to be made, knowing what is happening will make things easier for everyone.

When making a plan:

- Make it open to everyone who is involved.
- Be honest
- Be creative with ideas and solutions
- Be willing to compromise on some things.
- Write it down
- Let people know what the plan is and what is expected of them.
- Work at making this Christmas one with good memories.

While there will always be ex-husbands, ex-wives and ex-partners there is no such thing as an ex-child. Parents can sometimes forget how important the other parent is to their child. (Some parents can also forget how important they are to their children.) Without question the single biggest problem for children following their parents' separation is being exposed to continuing parental conflict. A parent who cares deeply for their children often fails to view what is happening through the eyes of their children. Perhaps this Christmas it is worth stopping and making a plan and taking some small steps towards parenting co-operatively over the Christmas period and into the year ahead – the benefits for your children will be worth it.

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www.whenparentssplit.com

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