

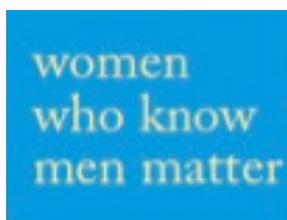
Co-Parenting Tips for the Holidays



During the holidays, we look forward to spending time with family and loved-ones. Children are developing memories that will last a lifetime. As parents, we want them to be wonderful memories. However, the holiday season brings typical pressures and stresses, and some of us have the extra responsibility of navigating co-parenting relationships with a former spouse or partner. Here are a few co-parenting suggestions that can reduce stress—particularly for children—during the holidays.

1. **Put Children First and Act in Their Best Interest:** Remember this one very important rule: *It's no longer about you!* Ask yourself if the decisions you're making and the arrangements you're proposing are in the best interest of your children. Despite how you may feel about your co-parent, your children love you both and need to establish their own relationships with each of you.
2. **Reflect** for a moment on your own holiday experiences as a child. If they were pleasant, then you want the same for your children. If you have unpleasant holiday memories, then you are fully aware of how that felt, and you can give your children better experiences. **Remember** that no matter what your faith is, this is a time of year for celebrating family, life, and giving thanks. Regardless of how you feel about your child's parent, both of you created the child you love, and that is a gift.
3. **Create New Traditions:** If you are no longer romantically involved with your child's parent, or s/he is incarcerated, or deployed, instead of trying to carry old traditions forward, acknowledge to your children that things are different now and build new traditions and rituals. No, it may not be the same as before, but it can still be happy and meaningful.
4. **Agree to a Plan and Stick to It:** Open the lines of communication for your children's sake. Discuss in person, by email, or telephone (whichever way works best for both of you) until you come to an agreement. **Write it down**, then exchange the plan for the holiday season, including who will spend time where, for how long, and how gifts will be purchased. You may also want to share the holiday schedule with grandparents or other family members to avoid schedule conflicts.
5. **Don't Compete, Cooperate:** Do not try to "out-Santa" the other parent. Your children are not prizes to be won, and when you give in to the urge to compete with your ex, everyone loses. It's best to discuss and agree on what gifts will be purchased. Note, however, that one parent should not be made to feel guilty if they are not in a financial position to purchase a gift that the other parent suggests.

6. **Inform** your children of how they will spend the holidays. Do not let them decide or choose—that is too much responsibility to put on a child’s shoulders. Let your children know that you and their mother/father have set up a great holiday plan that will allow them to enjoy time with both of you. Your attitude during delivery is important. Children are very intuitive; they pick-up and internalize nonverbal cues.
7. **Listen to Your Children:** Even a child who is well adjusted may start become distressed during the holidays. Don’t panic and don’t try to minimize what your child is feeling. Let them talk about it. Listen. And never get into the blame game in front of your kids. Even if you no longer get along with your former partner, for your child, that’s still mom or dad. On the other hand, don’t over indulge your children or waiver on the agreed upon plan because of a sense of guilt.
8. **Communicate and Be Considerate:** Keep your end of the bargain. Do not change the plans without discussing it first with your co-parent (not his or her aunt or mother). **Communicate** any unanticipated changes, late arrivals, etc. with your co-parent. Be considerate of the other person’s time. Remember that the focus is the well being of the most important people in this situation, your children.
9. **Commend each other** for putting your children first. No one is perfect, and guess what? No one typically has a perfect holiday! Accept that there may be stressful moments, mix-ups, etc. Take a deep breath, smile, and keep moving forward.
10. **Take the High Road:** Remember that you only have control over you and your behaviors. Even if you think your child’s ex is a “devil in disguise,” you can set a wonderful example for your children by purchasing a gift for your child to give to his or her parent or help your child make a present. If you really want to go the extra diplomatic mile, do the same for any significant other in your ex’s life that will be spending time with your child during the holidays. Consider inviting your child’s mother/father over for brunch or meeting at a “neutral” place for coffee or a snack for a short time before your children are exchanged. Small gestures can go a long way, and what your children want more than anything is to see their parents getting along and respecting one another, regardless of their romantic or marital status. These are the kinds of gifts that truly keep on giving.



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