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Divorce, the Holidays, and Children

Helping children adjust to a divorce can be enough of a challenge. However, when your divorce and related orders affect your holiday plans, it can be even more of a challenge. One way to help make the season manageable and less stressful for the parents and children is to agree on a schedule ahead of time and stick with it. Last minute changes and cancellation of holiday plans may not only be a headache for the other spouse, but may also cause undue confusion and hurt for the children. When children know what to expect, the transition will be easier. If at all possible, both parents should try to adhere to the traditions that matter most to the children. However, don't miss out on the opportunity to create new traditions and happy memories. Parents may have to work together to lower expectations all across the board and remember the least amount of upheaval will best for everyone.

Communication between parents and presenting a united front is absolutely vital. This is particularly important when ironing out details such as, where children will spend Christmas Eve or Christmas morning, holiday dinners, religious services, time with extended family, and what time and place will be best for exchanges. Parents may even need to discuss and plan gift ideas together, specifically spending limits. Be sure to keep the extended family members in the loop about the holiday schedule and expectations. The use of technology, such as Facetime and Skype, may even help parents or extended family members maintain a connection with children when they are away from one parent during a special holiday event.

Divorce is a difficult time for anyone, regardless of the time of year or the circumstances. While the divorce rate has declined across the country in the last two years; it consistently remains higher for couples who are on their second or third marriages. For those on their second marriage, the divorce rate is 60%; and it is 73% for couples on a third marriage. When broken down according to time of year, January is when divorce filings are at the highest rate. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Massachusetts currently has the lowest divorce rate in the country. However, Massachusetts is not immune to the high number of divorces that occur right after the holidays. For those who are affected by divorce this time of year, there are some tips that can help you cope with divorce during the holidays.

Remember, your children aren't getting a divorce, you and your spouse are. Embrace the holiday spirit and work together as a team to make the holidays spectacular, especially for your children.

For those who don't have children, divorce during the holidays can still be a time of great upheaval and uncertainty. It can also be a time of emotional difficulties, anxiety, stress, loneliness, and depression. The holiday season may remind people of happier times in their marriage, or even reinforce why divorce is the best option. For those struggling to cope or handle divorce during the

holidays, it will help to have a support system in place. It is vital that we turn to our friends and family for support. There may be others in your circle of friends, family, or co-workers who have been through a divorce during the holidays as well. Spending time with supportive people can help you avoid further depression or anxiety.

However, if your support network was once primarily your spouse's family, continuing to remain involved with in-laws and their family's traditions may be tricky. Even if continuing with those traditions is possible, the topic will likely need to be discussed and planned well in advance. Starting new traditions or getting involved with volunteer opportunities may help you take your mind off of what the holidays may have been like before. There is life after divorce, including during the holiday season. Planning a holiday get-away or non-traditional experience may help you move beyond any holiday blues related to your divorce.

The most important tip to help anyone affected by divorce during the holidays is to take care of you physically and emotionally. The holiday season has a way of becoming overwhelming and stressful under the best of circumstances. Planning ahead, clearly communicating your needs, and reaching out to others who may be a source of support and guidance may be the best gift you can give to yourself, or anyone else who is dealing with divorce during the holidays.

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