

Isolina Ricci's Holiday Tips for Parents

1. What's really important? Ask your children, "What are your favorite things about the holidays?" Children need to feel they have a voice and talking about what's really important to them (and you) can bring you closer together and provide you with the opportunity to let them express their feelings. Even if you no longer can afford that ski trip or a big shopping spree, you can still do the low budget things.

2. Work together to plan and produce holiday traditions. After separation, the "old family feeling" needs to be reshaped into your "new family feeling" and working together as a team for a party or to prepare for a religious service is a powerful force. Mom or Dad can be the family team leader, but the kids should also feel needed by contributing to the effort.

3. Remember, your children take their cues from you. When the children are with you, try not to feel guilty or angry about the divorce or the way the children's time is arranged. Instead, try your best to appreciate what you do have that's precious. Health? Togetherness? Slowing down? A family team? Friends and family? Kids interpret events based on their parents' attitude and actions.

4. Concentrate on things that are not high budget. Divorce rarely leaves enough money for everyone to do everything they desire. But the advertisements and peer pressure for collecting electronics or clothing, taking trips, or enjoying lavish meals and parties can leave one feeling deprived, even depressed. Take a reality check. Is acquiring material things the only key to happy holidays? Help them appreciate the lasting pleasures of friendship, giving to others less fortunate, home made gifts, and giving the gift of oneself.

5. Plan Now and Double Check Your Plans With Others. Contact the other parent and double check the time, place, and details of how this holiday season will work for the kids. Don't put this off. A parent might assume that the transfer takes place after Thanksgiving dinner at 3 pm but the other parent assumes a pick-up before they eat. Even if you already have a Parenting Plan, reconfirm the transfer times, where, who picks up or drops off. Holidays are notorious for confused signals.

6. Set some limits and take care of yourself. Think back to last year. Did you or one of the kids get sick because you overdid and there was not enough sleep or down-time? The holidays can be too much and our bodies rebel. Children are creatures of routine and the holidays exceptions can backfire and lead to irritability, illness, or even withdrawal. Finally, when you are feeling that deep ache in the pit of your stomach because of the divorce, try to take some deep breaths and reach out to others for understanding. Take heart, things do get better over time and there is a way through this to a better day.