

## Separation & Divorce and the Holiday Season

If you are recently separated, you are likely wondering what the holidays will feel like for you and your children this year. While there is no one correct parenting arrangement that works for all families, there are a variety of options that might work for your family. Some families alternate years or holidays, with the children spending time with dad one year, and then spending time with mom the next. Other families split the day, spending the morning at dad's house, and then going over to mom's later in the afternoon, for example. Other families, who have very amicable relationships, are able to spend all or part of the holidays all together. But try to remember that your family is unique and try to be flexible to do what's best for you and your children, regardless of what might work for other families.

To determine what might work best for your family, it's important to think about what will work well for your children. In large part, what would be best for your children depends a lot on their personalities. But you might also consider your relationship with your ex-partner: is there much animosity between you? Are things amicable? Do you get along well, or tend to quarrel? If just seeing your ex-partner upsets you, a midday switch could end up making the day tense for everyone.

Try to remember, too, to do your best not to force your children between you and your partner. Regardless of your children's ages, being forced to choose between parents can have very negative effects on children. It's widely acknowledged by experts that you shouldn't argue in front of your children, and if you need to vent about your ex, do it when your children are not around. Even very young children can pick up on tension. Be especially cautious of phone conversations, either with your ex, or venting to friends and family about the situation. Often, children who should be sleeping are listening to every word.

If your children are young, or they just want your input, you could help your children pick out gifts for their other parent. This might be tough for you, but it's important for your children to know you recognize the presence of the 'other' most important person in their lives. If relations between you and your ex are volatile, try to remember that the gifts are from your children, not from yourself.

When you are buying or making gifts for your children, try not to compete with the other parent. Everybody wants to create a great holiday for their family, but being in direct competition with your ex is stressful for you and your kids.

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Understand that you can't change the other parent. He or she might do things differently than you, and that is unlikely to change. Do your best to respect and support his or her decisions.

If you usually call to check in on your kids during visits with the other parent, feel free to do so during the holidays, but no more than you usually would. Your kids might already worry about you while they are not with you, and more calls or texts than usual might increase this worry.

On a positive note, now is a great time to start creating your own family traditions. You might feel disappointed that you can't recreate your childhood experiences, but your kids won't know what they're missing! Whether it's breakfast in new pyjamas or lighting candles together, building traditions offers children a sense of predictability and stability.

And finally, take good care of yourself! Many people feel down or depressed over the holidays. It can be painful to wake up to an empty house over the holidays, but try to accept what is, and make the best of it. Exercise, get some of those "to-do's" crossed off your list, or hang out in your pyjamas. Maybe ask friends or coworkers who have experienced separation how they coped – chances are, they felt much the same as you do, and maybe they found some healthy strategies to help them feel better and move forward. You can talk to friends, family, or the staff at the [Klinic Crisis Line](#) at 786-8686 in Winnipeg or toll-free at 1-888-322-3019, or TTY 204-784-4097.

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