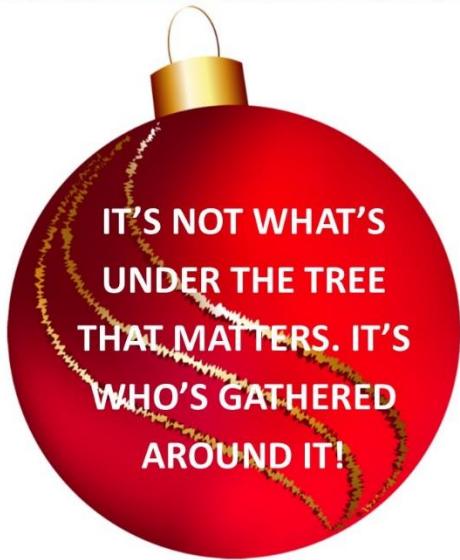


SURVIVING THE HOLIDAYS



25 Holiday Tips for Single Parents

Holidays can create anxieties and conflicts for single and divorced parents. The following suggestions may help you better manage and enjoy your holiday season.

It's difficult not to feel the holidays - the decorations, the carols, and the inundation of sales everywhere. But perhaps your journey into singlehood is leaving you feeling more like The Grinch; the lack of funds, multiple life changes, and children who may still be reeling from loss or divorce, may cause difficulties for this "jolly" time of year that weren't present before. As a single parent it's important to dawn some new perspectives regarding the holidays as well.

So here we go...

Tip #1

Choose to spend time and to celebrate the holidays with people who lift your spirits. Spending time with people you don't enjoy, out of a sense of obligation, will only bring discomfort to you and your children.

Tip #2

Discuss and plan visits and gift giving with your former partner well ahead of the holiday season.

Tip #3

Go over your upcoming holiday plans with your children. If your children are traveling during the holidays (especially if they are traveling alone), review travel plans with them. Acknowledge and alleviate any of their fears and anxieties regarding their holiday travels.

Tip #4

Try to agree on gift selection and cost with your former partner, never attempting to outdo your ex with better and more expensive gifts. If your ex-partner chooses to lavish inappropriately expensive gifts on your children (especially if you cannot afford such gifts), don't place your children in the middle of your arguments over this. Consider giving special gifts of your time and making the holidays less materialistic.

Tip #5

Set Boundaries. Precisely explain to your family and friends what you are capable of doing this year, and what you aren't. Don't let others guilt you into taking on more than you can handle.

Tip #6

If your children are with their other parent for the holidays, don't send them off with a display of sadness, disappointment or anger. They should not be made to feel guilty or conflicted. Encourage them to enjoy themselves and tell them you'll be looking forward to seeing them when they return to you.

Tip #7

Continue to use old family traditions if they still work for your family but also consider creating new traditions that might have more meaning for your family's current situation.

Tip #8

Plan celebrations with friends (and with other single parent families) if you will not be with your children and/or your extended family for the holidays.

Tip #9

Scale down and simplify your holiday celebrations. Whenever possible involve your children in holiday planning.

Tip #10

Budget some "alone time" to satisfy your own needs -- a long walk, lunch with an understanding friend, listening to music.

Tip #11

Redefine the holidays. One of the best ways to reduce stress induced by the approaching holiday season is to consider what the holidays mean to you and your kids. Is it about hearing Christmas carols while everyone pitches in to prepare the Christmas pudding? Or do you look forward to spend some quiet time with your kids explaining to them the meaning of Christmas and the values it symbolizes. Once you have re-evaluated the significance of the holidays for you and your family, it will be easier to go through it since you will be focusing only on the truly enjoyable and meaningful aspect of the holidays.

Tip #12

Consider what you cannot do without. Sit down with your kids and discuss what activities are indispensable for putting the whole family in the holiday mood. For some it may be the entire

experience of shopping for gifts, wrapping them up and then gleefully opening them on Christmas Day. For others, it may be the act of decorating the Christmas tree or painstakingly preparing Christmas cookies. Decide what you and your kids would like to do best over the holidays and then go ahead with them. Choosing to limit your activities to those which really symbolize the meaning of the holidays for you and your kids will not only cut away unwanted aspects but make the whole thing actually enjoyable.

Tip #13

Pare down the non-essentials. The very exercise of focusing on the meaningful part of the holidays will also make you aware of the activities which are hardly likely to matter if dropped. If your kids no longer enjoy hosting a cookie party for the neighborhood kids, there is no reason why you should keep doing so just because you used to do it when you were not single. Again, if you feel that this year you want to keep the Christmas decorations to a minimum, choose a smaller tree or consider buying a pre-lit Christmas tree. Just because you have been following certain rituals in the past does not imply that you have to go through them in detail, even when they no longer mean much to you. Doing away with the non-essentials or modifying them to suit present priorities will work wonders in cutting down stress related to holiday expectations.

Tip #14

Invent new traditions. While family traditions form the core of holidays for many, feel free to invent new traditions which make you and your kids happy. If all the previous Christmas lunches were spent in the company of extended family members like grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, ask your kids if this year they would like to go out to a restaurant for a special Christmas buffet and then drive through the town in the evening to watch the holiday lights. The holidays should be a fun time for you and your kids, so be open to doing whatever all of you like best.

Tip #15

Reach out to others. Networking with other single-parent families is often a great way of dealing with stress brought on during holidays. If possible, plan the Christmas lunch with another family – this will not only save on expenses but also allow for the distribution of labor necessary to come up with a traditional spread. Again if you wish to attend midnight mass at your church, see if you can go with another single-parent family. Being together will not only lessen the pain of missing the other parent but will enrich the celebrations since you and your kids will be able to better relate to other single-parent families.

Tip #16

Find fulfilling activities for yourself. If your kids are going to spend the holidays with your ex-spouse, consider what will be the most meaningful way to spend your own time. If you have been looking for a break for a long time, use the spare time to rest and relax. Read a book, cook a favorite dish, listen to Christmas carols or do whatever helps you to unwind. However if you do not wish to be on your own, catch up with old friends and arrange to meet them but stay away from families with kids if you feel you are going to miss your own children. Again you could use your time and resources to volunteer at a charity of your choice. Find out what would make you happiest and then go ahead with those plans.

Tip #17

Put a lid on your budget. The key to surviving the holidays as a single parent is not to overstretch yourself and this holds good for your holiday shopping budget too. Make a list of the people who must have gifts this year and then see how much you can spend comfortably. If there is still some money left, extend the list to those who have not done something particularly great for your family but still are in your thoughts. On no account, you should buy gifts on credit. Don't give in when kids try to emotionally blackmail you for expensive toys. Say no to their demands firmly but cheerfully and if they are old enough to understand, offer them a choice between a pricey toy and a movie on Christmas afternoon.

Tip #18

It is easy to get caught up in the commercialism of the holiday season so that having a good time often gets reduced to what to buy, wear or use. Celebrating the holidays is so much more than merely going through a check-list of must-have gifts or even to-do customs. Bring back the focus on the simpler and more meaningful aspects of the holiday season and you will not only able to survive it as a single parent but also enjoy it wholeheartedly.

Tip #19

Focus on what the holidays will truly mean to your family. Ideally, the holidays should mean more than just buying presents for each other. If you have religious beliefs surrounding Christmas, Hanukah, Kwanzaa, etc...., make sure you ground yourself in the "spirit" the holidays are meant to convey; involve yourself in the religious activities focusing on the hope, peace, and love the Holiday season is meant to bring.

Santa, toys, and cookies can be fun, but, as most material "things" lack true significance, the holidays can seem even more empty once all the boxes have been opened and the pretty paper and glistening bows are rammed/stuffed into a normal everyday garbage bag.

Tip #20

Make some time for yourself. Being a single parent can bring some enormous challenges, in and of itself,; but during the holidays, it may be even more important that you participate in activities that nourish yourself. Enjoying time to yourself will help you enjoy the time you have with your kids even more.

Tip #21

Give yourself a break and keep it simple. Pinterest and DIY sites are very creative, but don't let yourself get bogged down with all the things that people are suggesting you "should" do with your kids. Play to your strengths: if you tend to be more of an outdoor person, take your children to a Christmas tree farm; if you tend to be more of a baker, then cook a holiday meal together; if crafting is your thing, then stick to simple projects the kids can do mostly by themselves (and they will feel better about it if they did most of the work).

Tip #22

Consider spreading out your holiday celebrations, employing several scaled-down events rather than celebrating only the "big times" (e.g. Christmas Day, Christmas Eve).

Tip #23

Accept the difficulty of this time of year and your loss. Remind yourself that it's a season and it will pass.

Tip #24

Socialize. Don't hibernate. Insecure feelings may tempt you to isolate, but force yourself to go out even if it's only for a short time.

Tip #25 - Christmas Day

It's all about Jesus! Enjoy today, it's Christmas Day! Remember what today symbolizes. Today we celebrate the birth of Jesus, the Christ, the one and only Son of God. Born of a Virgin to come to earth to save us of our sins. What a wonderful day today is. CELEBRATE and GIVE THANKS to Almighty God! Merry Christmas...

REMEMBER...

You will likely have many more holiday seasons, with many more opportunities for success and failure so take it all in stride, breathe, and keep in mind: it's just a season, and it will be over soon!

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