



ALL IN THE FAMILY

Legal blog on all aspects of Family Law and Divorce in Massachusetts and Rhode Island

Co-Parenting During the Holidays

BY ANDREA T. DUNBAR • DECEMBER 3, 2024

The hustle and bustle of the holidays causes added stress for even the most organized, forward thinkers among us. Add in going through a custody dispute or operating in the context of two households after a custody dispute, and the stress can seem unbearable. Co-parenting with your ex-partner, or soon to be ex-partner, during the holidays doesn't have to add to your stress if you keep the following in mind.

CO-PARENT EARLY AND OFTEN

If you are in the midst of a custody dispute, begin thinking and communicating about a holiday schedule for the children early (not in November; more like early September), and remain in frequent communication as plans can change. Waiting until the last minute is a recipe for disaster. If there is disagreement, everyone will be under the gun and it will be difficult, if not impossible, to get into court to get a determination from a judge on a holiday parenting schedule. Most courts refuse to hear holiday parenting issues as an emergency given that it is no mystery when the holidays fall each year. If you already have a custody determination, consult your judgment or agreement, which should contain the holiday parenting schedule for the children. Communicate with your former partner about any unforeseen issues with the agreed upon/ordered schedule and try to cooperatively resolve same. The earlier everyone is aware of the plan, or any modifications thereto, the less conflict there will be.

KEEP IT ABOUT THE CHILDREN

Remaining child focused when determining a holiday parenting schedule, or just navigating all of the responsibilities of the holiday season, can ease stress. Your children will pick-up on your stress and any animosity with your partner, or former partner, so minimizing this by focusing on what is best for the children in each situation will be more harmonious for everyone. For example, it is likely not best to deny your children the opportunity to attend your ex's family holiday party that they have attended every year since they were babies and at which all of their cousins will be present, because it is your parenting day. Flexibility and putting aside your own wants and desires for the benefit of your children in this situation is key.

MAINTAIN THE STATUS QUO AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE

Change is inevitable when households separate, but to the extent you can keep things “normal” for your children, especially during the holidays, your family will be better served. Casting aside traditions in favor of some yet to be tested, allegedly optimal, holiday parenting plan will only create stress for everyone. So, keep it simple. If the children have always celebrated Christmas Eve with your family and Christmas Day with your ex’s family, maintain that for them if possible. Keep in mind, however, that if the holidays involved celebrating with only one family while in an intact family, this will need to change.

BE REASONABLE WHILE CO-PARENTING DURING THE HOLIDAYS

Taking unreasonable positions will only serve to create anger and chaos. Moreover, if you end up in front of a judge relating to holiday co-parenting matters, and you are seen as unreasonable, this will not go well for you and potentially tarnish your reputation with the judge going forward. In holiday co-parenting situations, typically “what is good for the goose is good for the gander,” meaning both parents should enjoy mostly equal time and privileges.

COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE

Effective communication is key in all divorce situations, but especially when co-parenting during the holiday season. Be direct, forthright and respectful in your communications with your co-parent. Ensure everyone understands what the plan is and what his/her obligations are. Communicating in writing is most effective. Co-parenting applications, such as AppClose and Our Family Wizard, contain key features such as text messaging and a family calendar that can provide a central location for co-parenting communications.

Co-parenting at any time of year is difficult, but especially during the holidays. Keep the above tips in mind and your holiday season will remain merry and bright.