



COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE TORONTO

Parenting Pointers for the Holidays

Holidays can be an exciting as well as an emotional time for parents and children, especially after separation. The following are a few pointers for parents from our Collaborative Child and Family Specialists in planning for the holidays:

- because each family's needs and experiences are unique, there is no "one size fits all" when it comes to parenting arrangements over the holidays - be flexible and look at a variety of options - children themselves may have creative ideas
- sharing a special holiday in two homes on one day with extended family and/or new partners can be overwhelming, particularly for younger children – give your child time to adjust and cope with transitions and check in with your child to see if this is working for them
- holiday plans that work for young children may not work for older children – review parenting plans every few years, particularly on "milestone dates", for example when a child reaches at 5 years of age, and then again in 5 to 7 years. Make sure shared holidays meet the needs of the child and take into account the child's wishes as well as the interests of parents and extended family
- it's important for parents to keep communication lines open and follow through with agreed-upon pick-up and drop-off times
- don't try to recreate the holiday you had as an intact family – take the opportunity to invent a new holiday tradition with your children
- don't compete with one another over holiday events
- as children get older give them some input into the holiday arrangements –but make it clear they get a "voice", not a "choice" –

asking children where they prefer to spend a holiday may present loyalty conflicts

- separation triggers a range of emotions –the more conflict, and the higher emotions run between parents, the more important it is that a family work with a child and family specialist to ensure parenting plans, including holiday plans, are child-focused
- do not use holiday arrangements as a time to take revenge on the other parent – it is your child who will suffer
- holidays after a separation can be stressful for parents as well as children - when your child is with the other parent take time to relax and enjoy yourself – let your child know you're going to be OK, so they don't worry and feel guilty spending time with the other parent