

Whose House is MY House for Christmas: Mommy's or Daddy's?

by

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If you've recently divorced and see the holidays coming fast, planning ahead will make certain things will go smoothly for you and your children. It's important to anticipate problems and prevent them from turning a joyful season into a nightmare. Remember the old saying, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

The ounce of prevention is to contact your ex about your parenting plans for Christmas Eve/ Day and make certain you both know whose turn it is to have the kids, when, where and for how long.

The pound of cure, as every divorce lawyer knows, is to call your lawyer's office one or two days before the holiday hysterical that the kids are going to New York to his folks. *This cure probably won't work.*

If for some reason you and your ex haven't developed a clear plan, you need to sit down with him and work one out. If issues need to be resolved, hire a private mediator to help you develop one or you may find yourself back in court with a referee putting your plan together. You may not like this plan at all.

If you're new to the post-divorce life and your children are old enough to have strong memories of Christmas' past, it may be very jarring to have the traditions they remember disrupted. You need to be prepared to deal with the issue of which ornaments go on which tree. Consider buying or making new ones for each tree, both yours and your ex's. Also, what is the protocol going to be if either you or your ex have remarried and the new partners have children from prior marriages who have different holiday rituals? Your children will have the positive opportunity to get twice as many presents and have two Christmas dinners instead of one, but there's also the real possibility they will be filled with guilt, if one of the parents has not remarried and has no one to share dinner with when the kids are with the other parent. They feel they have abandoned him/her. If that parent is you, put on a positive front to prevent ruining their holiday.

A therapist told me children have said: "I don't want to have Christmas at Mommy's house or Daddy's house, I want to have Christmas at MY house." While there is no right answer to this, what's important is the statement is being made. It signals an anxiety issue and a fear of abandonment which needs to be addressed. Older children can deal more easily with divorce if you and your ex cooperate in parenting. They are secure knowing they have two loving parents. Younger children who haven't grasped the new arrangement need assurance they now have two homes to share with Mommy and Daddy and are loved in both places. Planning ahead helps avoid many of these holiday parenting dilemmas.