

# Savvy Holidays Tips for Divorced Parents

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## How to Keep From Getting Into It With Your Ex

There is no time more sensitive for divorced parents and their children than around the holidays. And, the holidays are just around the corner. So how can you stay out of arguments and conflicts as you try to delicately navigate through this period — a time of the year when nostalgia fills the air, children are yanked back and forth, and feelings are often notoriously raw?

While holidays can be a difficult time because the season portends of a sense of idealism and hope (and you may not be riding that “goodwill” train) it’s important to keep a healthy perspective and some degree of objectivity. If you can do that, you can move through this period with a sense of good cheer and possibly some ease.. The following are some sensible tips on how to mitigate the tense situations that might have you going off on your ex and losing your cool:

1. Put the children first: Always! Despite the anger, resentment or hurt feelings you may be harboring, think about how any squabbling, tension or derogatory remarks about or to your ex will impact the kids. If you’re conscious of being a good role model (and you should be) that thought alone should keep you on the right track. Also, you don’t want the kids to blame you for being a Scrooge someday down the line because you decided to give your ex an earful while in the midst of a pick up or drop off. Sure, maybe it’s unfair he/she is trying to “out-gift” you or makes their holiday get together a bit more extravagant than yours, but think of the children. They often won’t voice how hard it is to enjoy the holidays in two different households, but in most instances it is. Think how you might make them feel if you get into it with your ex.
2. Find a constructive outlet to vent any negative feelings: This might include boxing lessons to volunteering for the needy at your local place of worship to indulging yourself in a guilty pleasure. I knew of one woman who would do her gift shopping with a philosophy of: One for them, one for me! To show the children she was gracious, she even purchased some small gifts for her ex and his new family (and for each purchase she bought one gift for herself!). Whatever you can do in a positive way to provide some levity or relief from the sorrow you may be feeling deep down; an activity, an act of charity or a different way of gift shopping just may help to stave off some of the negative feelings. And when it comes to giving some small, but thoughtful gift to your ex, it usually prompts him/her to be kinder.
3. Give all the way around: Notwithstanding the gifts to your ex and his/her family (it’s hard to be angry or derogatory toward anyone who gives you a gift during the holidays), try giving in other ways to keep the peace. Be flexible. If you are the militant type and want to keep to your regimented custody visitation schedule, for example, be willing to change it up a bit over the holidays. Doing so demonstrates to the children (and others) that you are truly in the spirit. Time share during the holidays with the kids is one of

the biggest bones of contention. But, being generous with more give than take reinforces the true meaning of the holidays and what they stand for. Besides, such a gesture teaches the children a very valuable lesson — kindness, tolerance, strength....

4. Seek counseling: Lining up a trusted therapist or spiritual advisor who you can talk to on a regular basis as you move through this touchy period, is yet another means for staving off the urge to get into it with your ex. Though your advocate, this person is also the one who can talk some sense into you. He or she will likely make you think twice about saying the wrong thing to your ex or his or her family (especially in front of the kids). It is during these “advisor” sessions that you can really let loose. I knew a guy who booked sessions with his therapist every weekday from Thanksgiving through the New Year. He did this in order to have a safe haven to scream, cry or otherwise vent his hurt and frustration. In session, he would spout off everything he wanted to say to his ex and then some which made him feel better. He later told me that by the time he encountered his hostile ex he was so spent from his “venting” sessions he just handled her with a “whatever” attitude. His repetitive therapy paid off. The kids thought he was a hero for keeping his cool.

5. Look ahead: Keep your eye on that ball that falls on December 31 — the one that heralds in a New Year. Chances are you will feel a sense of relief and optimism as you look ahead, knowing that the holidays will soon be behind you and you can get back to what feels normal to you.

6. Re-purpose your energy: Being in a state of angst or frustration is draining; it takes a good deal of energy to maintain that state. Energy can be your best friend if you expend it positively. Take just one day as you approach the holidays — a day when you’re beginning to feel those angry or hopeless feelings you get as you anticipate the holidays — and track how much time and effort it has zapped from you. Instead of thinking of different negative scenarios you may encounter with your ex., think about ways to redecorate your living room; write that blog you promised you would do; contact your Congressperson with a letter of complaint.... There are countless ways to take the same energy and thought processes and do something else with them — something that is of benefit to you.

In sum, remember that warring with your ex during the holidays only causes more strife and discord. You want the opposite: A sense of peace and goodwill. It’s yours. You have the power to claim it!

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