

Dealing with the holiday season as a newly divorced couple

When you go through a divorce or separation, there are all kinds of “firsts” you have to confront: the first nights alone in your bed; the first time your anniversary passes; the first time you go on a date with someone new. The first holiday season you spend as a separated or divorced couple, is a particularly challenging “first” for many people. For most, the holidays are a time of familial togetherness; it’s a moment when families gather to take a breath at the end of the year, share food, and take part in festive traditions and rituals. When the unit that previously made up your family is broken, this time can likewise seem shattered and perhaps even hopeless, often leading to feelings of doubt, anxiety, and depression. How is it possible to celebrate family when it feels like it no longer exists in the way it used to? How can you put on a happy face for your children and relatives when holiday cheer is inaccessible to you? Here are some ideas and insights that can help you navigate the holiday season - from merely getting through it to hopefully even enjoying it.

Helping yourself

First of all, recognize that it isn’t all in your head: this really is an especially difficult time. One way to release stress and negative emotions is to do the best you can to remove any absolutes or black-and-white thinking from your mind. Replace the word “should” with “could” and “perfect” with “good enough”. Allow yourself to be where you’re at and experience the painful or uncomfortable feelings that will likely arise. Keeping your feelings bottled up and feigning happiness will do more harm than good. At the same time, *expecting* things to be bad can be a self-fulfilling prophecy, so invest energy in finding things you love about this time, and take pleasure in the peaceful and joyful moments that come your way.

Helping your children

If you have kids, it can be a huge challenge to figure out how to handle the intricacies of who they will spend the holidays with. What used to be the most fun part of this season may now feel full of negative emotions and conflict. In these times, remember that children are both resilient and sensitive: they can adapt to many modes of being and situations, but they’re equally able to pick up on moods and non-verbal forms of communication. Allow your kids to express their feelings about this new holiday orientation and schedule. Be excited for them, what may seem burdensome to you can still hold a lot of magic for your kids.

Helping your former partner

It may be the furthest thing from your mind, but remember that the person you used to share your life with is probably having just as difficult a time as you are. Being patient and generous with their needs will also help you in the long run. Kindness towards your ex will show your kids and the rest of your family that it’s possible to still celebrate being a family, even if that family does not look like it did before.

It is true that after a divorce, nothing will ever be the same. The holidays are no exception. So instead of trying to mold this new reality into the shape of an imaginary past, try and welcome change. Together with your kids, your ex, and your extended family, be creative and come up with new traditions and ways of celebrating, rather than trying to stick to the old ones. Holidays won’t be what you imagined or what they used to be, but they can still be a joyful and loving time of celebration.



BALANCE

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These are just some ideas to bring increased tolerance and diversity into your children's lives. Teaching these skills is about encouraging critical thinking, and challenging assumptions and dominant representations. If your children express prejudiced views or language, ask them why they think that way, and likewise encourage them to ask questions when they receive general information about a whole group of people. Make diversity-education a part of your everyday life – because it's really an ongoing process and long-term project!

Looking for additional support? Your Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) can help. You can receive support through a variety of resources. Call your EFAP at 1 800 387-4765 or visit workhealthlife.com.

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