



# 09 Children's Issues

Story thanks to  
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## the holiday shuffle

### Is a Christmas split between two families double the fun or twice the sadness for children?

Christmas is a very special time for families and especially for children. Putting up the Christmas tree together, baking cookies with Mum and hanging up fairy lights with Dad are memories that children cherish and look forward to all year long. But what happens when Mum and Dad don't live together anymore?

Parental separation inevitably causes pain and disruption for children, but the thought of not being able to open presents with both Mum and Dad on Christmas Day is bewildering for children. If not dealt with carefully and compassionately, Christmas can easily become a time of pain and sadness for children rather than one of merriment and joy.

Children need to be children at Christmas. They should be preoccupied with dreams of Santa and reindeers; not filled with guilt over their warring parents. So here are some ways to help make Christmas a time of joy again in your child's life:

[1] Reinforce that although you and your ex no longer love each other, a love a parent has for their child never extinguishes, no matter what, and both you and their other parent love

them unconditionally. If your child is younger, try getting this message across with art or storytelling.

[2] Reinforce that the separation was not their fault and check that they know that you and your ex are not going to get together again, no matter how the children behave. Talk about your plans for the future in positive terms that do not include your ex.

[3] Give your child permission to love and care for both parents, and if appropriate, both step parents. Encouraging your children to make something special for your ex and their family will not only increase the goodwill, but reinforce the Christmas spirit.

[4] Make sure that the kids are in on the planning and organisation so that they will know what is happening in advance (but not in any disputes).

[5] Look at the situation through your children's eyes and put them first. Try to avoid too much travel for them over short periods as this causes exhaustion, especially when they have been up early to catch Santa Claus.

[6] Do not allow the children to be witness to or be involved in any tension between the families. They can pick it up, even if you do not intend them to, so be very vigilant. If necessary meet and communicate outside of the home.

[6] Get your child involved and excited about creating new Christmas traditions for you to enjoy together. Talk about it together and ensure it is consistent from year to year so that a new security is created.

[7] If you know the other parent is buying your child a rocking horse for Christmas, resist the urge to go out and buy your child a real pony! You cannot buy your child's love and Christmas is not a competition.

With extra care and sensitivity to their needs, you can make Christmas a time of joy and happiness for your child; no matter if they are having one Christmas, or two.

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