

Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18

Holidays can be emotionally draining. Divorce IS emotionally draining. Together they are overwhelming. The special events and the Advent Season remind us that we are all a family in His love, however our immediate families may look quite different. The stress of the unknown may be looming and our depression and pain may prevent our motivation to jump into the holiday spirit. Our cherished family traditions may not be possible or need modifications, and the pressure to host or make the magic happen for our children – young or old- is daunting.

The key to avoid disaster and disappointment is communication, planning and keeping it simple!

This is a great opportunity to reflect on what you enjoyed most about the holidays. What made the holidays special and memorable. Ask the children and the adult children what they look forward to and their most favorite traditions. You might be surprised what they remember and value. A big expensive meal you spent so much time getting to the table hot and presentable may not even be on the list! The Christmas our kitchen was being remodeled forced our prime rib tradition to be replaced by pizza and was a big hit.

It is more effective if you put together a few options that would work for you when you communicate with your former spouse about schedules and gift giving. Keep in mind that December 25th is not the actual date Jesus was born, but a date that was celebrated and became the tradition. Therefore, if alternative years are agreed to celebrate with family on the actual day, it is possible to create the same celebration on another date. Often it is less stressful on an alternate day.

Give your children the gift to love both their parents. Help them buy or make a card and present for their other parent. This will go a long way towards minimizing tension and hurt feelings for the children when they can learn Christmas lessons of giving. The gesture also establishes the culture for the other parent to not feel they have to complete or be on the defensive. To be honest it is really in your best interest to show your children that you have their interests in mind and they are relieved of the pressure to have to choose between parents.

Finances are a concern post-divorce and some co-parenting families feel the need to compete for their children's happiness. If possible discuss with other parent and divide equally the gifts you may have given as a married couple to avoid duplicates or doubling gifts. Children tend to lose the meaning of Christmas when the focus is on quantity or quality of gifts. Call a truce and have a "non-compete" clause if at all possible.

The Advent season can be celebrated with little or no cost activities. String popcorn for the tree and home make ornaments to trim. Use art projects from school for gift wrap and make gifts for other family members. Visit living Nativities in your home town or celebrate tree lighting events at numerous locations to make fun evenings together. Plan a day of service to others as a family and especially if you will be alone on the holiday. Participating in a food bank on Thanksgiving if it is not your year for that holiday can be very cathartic and viewing the world from a different perspective can be healing.

It is important to remember to stick to a schedule and keep your word to children, family and friends. If you don't feel like attending something, do it anyway and give it a try. You can always leave early if you just can't be social, most of the time something good comes from the experience. Bring a plus one of the

same sex for support to parties & gatherings; let them know you might have to leave early, have a code if you need rescuing or an escape excuse. You are a role model to your children, even the adult ones, and they are watching how you are handling a negative transition. They also are in pain when their parents are in pain. Some will sacrifice their own happiness and opportunities for their parents. Sometimes if parents are having difficulties with depression and anger, children will pull away and avoid them if they feel there is nothing they can do to help. Don't miss out on children or grandchildren memories. Don't give your coparent the power to decide if you attend or not because they are attending. If you are invited, accept!

Social media including TV programs and movies can add to the stress and depression. Minimize your exposure and give yourself permission not to compete or compare. Keep in mind this is a journey and your feelings and situation will not be the same next year. Allow yourself to not send cards this year if you don't feel like the effort. If baking was your thing and you are not up for the task, skip it. Make New Year's goodies instead.

Divorce can change many things about our lives, but one good thing to come out would be to refocus on the message of the Christmas Season, welcoming Christ in our lives and in others. Advent is the time to prepare and welcome the Prince of Peace. Minimize the commercialization and stress. Take joy in our relationship with God our Father and remember that we will not walk this journey alone. ☺