



Kids of Separated Parents: The Annual Holiday Access Dispute

Forget about the last minute gift shopping. The real issue for separated parents this season is who gets what time with the kids. With divorce seemingly as popular as marriage, more and more kids will be subject to the annual access dispute carving them in half with less care than the turkey. Then to assuage parental guilt for their interminable situation, these kids will be dressed finer than the turkey with all the niceties from designer clothes to the latest in newfangled electronics. Thanks mom and dad... and mom and dad. Gobble gobble.

Of course the risk of settling holiday access at the last minute includes upset moms, upset dads and upset grandparents. If the kids aren't upset, it is likely because they have learned how to milk the situation for their own gain. More gobble gobble. (*Get the point?*)

Not the holidays of yore.

If the above is not quite what you had in mind this holiday season and access isn't yet resolved, consider the following:

1. Settle as far in advance of holiday time as possible. Assuming parents do, they can save themselves from the anger, anxiety and potential disappointment of last minute failed negotiations.
2. Think about the even year – odd year compromise. One parent gets first choice in even years and the other in odd years or simply switch the holiday time on an alternating year basis.
3. If parents cannot agree, consider a mediator. A mediator is like a referee or better still, your first grade teacher: Someone who will help you play nicely in the sandbox, or in this case the mediator's office, and hopefully just long enough to make a deal.
4. Let go a little. When negotiating, on your own or through a mediator, remember the best of negotiations regard the fact that

neither side gets 100% of what they want. Compromise is key. You've got to give something to get something.

5. Think outside of the box. How outside? There are some folks who chose to stay away from the main days altogether. Many parents have learned that it is not the particular day that is important but the new rituals they can develop. As such, while some parents are simply unwilling to let go of Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, other parents have learned to sanctify an alternate day as special. That is the special day their family gets together and celebrates with all the gusto they can muster. Kids in this scenario actually find great comfort in this strategy as it fully mitigates parental conflict and leaves the children open to enjoy their time with each parent and respective family.
6. If you still think you need a lawyer, consider those lawyers who have made the switch to Collaborative Family Law. They promise not to go to court, but to sit roundtable with you, the other parent and lawyer to respectfully come to a settlement.

Holiday time is stressful enough what with gift buying, planning for the kids' time off, seeing family and all. The added stress of settling holiday access can derail what should be a happy occasion into a tangle of hurt feelings. Give a little to get a little, think outside the box and most importantly, consider the kids. Anytime with parents and family can be wonderful and magical.

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