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IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

DIVORCING FAMILIES AND THE HOLIDAYS

Divorced or divorcing parents facing the holiday season can feel like participants in a Shakespearean tragedy or theater of the absurd. It may be more like unscripted improvisational theater. A situation of enormous loss and upheaval is coupled with a season flooded with images of family merriment and joy.

The challenge during the emotional roller-coaster ride of divorce is to both care for yourself and provide comfort, connection, and reassurance to your children. Here are some ways to ease the pain for you and your children and to help you create moments of joy and harmony:

- **Spread out the days of celebrating to reduce the intensity of “official” holidays.** Divorcing parents can change the calendar and celebrate the holidays on different days. This avoids splitting yourself and your children in half, making everyone feel shortchanged.

- **Involve your children in the planning process to enhance their sense of control.** Allowing children valid and limited choices reduces their stress. Make a calendar so they can see the schedule concretely and can look forward to when, where, and with whom they will be during the holiday season.

- **Understand that aggravating behaviors from your children may, or may not, be related to the divorce.** Your strength in patiently listening, and in setting and enforcing the usual limits, provides a sense of structure and security.

- **Be aware that your physical and emotional availability to your children**

is crucial. Divorce can create intense fears of abandonment. Spend “hang-out” time with them. Find toys (for younger children) and activities (for older children) that will increase your interaction and connection with them. Keep promises!

- **Maintain old traditions, but be aware that they can also evoke feelings of loss.** Therefore, also create new, simple rituals that provide comfort and warmth, such as introducing new tastes, smells, or sounds in the home.

- **Create structure.** Single parents are understaffed. Try to have certain nights dedicated to take-out dinners, games, or movies so you can be on “automatic” and free of extra planning.

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