

Can Separated Celebrities Create Happy Holidays for their Children?

With the recent news of marriages in ruin for Tiger and Elin Woods, Governor Mark and First Lady Jenny Sanford and even television celebrities Jon and Kate, can divorced parents learn something about managing the holidays from these stars?

Most couples don't have to deal with the ongoing scrutiny of their private lives or the level of public humiliation many celebrities endure. Yet how celebs are handling their first holiday living in separate homes (good or bad) offers some critical lessons for separating parents everywhere.

International divorce coach and parenting expert Christina McGhee says the first holiday after a separation or divorce doesn't have to be devastating for children. "Certainly parents splitting up is never going to be easy for children. Yet, how Mom and Dad handle the holidays can really impact their children's perception of how life is changing."

When the holidays hit often a child's feelings over the loss of their 'family' become much stronger. While younger children developmentally aren't aware of what is happening, they are extremely sensitive to parental stress and changes in their day-to-day lives. During this time of year, older children needs also often get overlooked. Many parents unintentionally pull teens into loyalty conflicts and may even expect them to make adult decisions about who they are with for the holidays.

To keep reactions in perspective, stress in check and children's needs at the top of their holiday list, McGhee has suggestions for the Woods, the Sanfords and "non-celebrity" who may be experiencing similar struggles but less public anguish.

Top Three Tips

- **Less is More**

While the rest of the world may be clamoring for details about your divorce, remember you're not just giving information about your life, but your children's lives too. When feelings are strong usually saying less is best. Keep in mind while you can always decide to say more later, you can't take back what you have already said.

Although it can be hard, maintain your integrity and be discreet about the information you share so children are protected from second hand details. If you need to talk something through, seek out a trusted friend who won't blab or a professional you can speak with privately.

- **Remember Nothing's Set in Stone**

Lots of parents wonder if it's better to keep things the same for children by spending their first holiday together. While minimizing change is important, avoid just going through the motions. Shielding children from tension and conflict trumps tradition.

Opening presents together Christmas morning will have little meaning for your children if they spend it with parents who are angry, anxious or hardly speaking to each other. Only engage in joint activities if it will be a positive "stress free" experience for your children.

- **Keep Your Kids in The Loop**

When parents split up, holidays can easily leave children feeling incredibly anxious and confused. One of the biggest culprits is not knowing what to expect. Plan on talking with children ahead of time about what the holiday will look like this year. Make sure kids know about upcoming events, when they will spend time with each parent and how special occasions will be handled.

Keep the lines of communication open by reassuring children it's okay to ask questions and talk about how they feel.

McGhee also offers insight and tips on:

- **How to Tell Your Children:** When parents separate, what do they tell the children...and when
- **How to Prepare Children for What to Expect:** Sometimes children worry about the parent they are not with for the holidays
- **Establishing Holiday Traditions:** How to create new holiday traditions for blended or single parent families
- **The Holiday Handover:** How to minimize the tension for children traveling from one family event to another
- **Keeping Communication Cheerful:** Communicating holiday plans with the other parent and with your children
- **Holidays Across Two Households:** Ease your children's emotional stress by keeping their point of view foremost in your plans

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"Every moment you are making memories with your children. Make sure the ones you're making are worth remembering." Christina McGhee – www.divorceandchildren.com

ABOUT CHRISTINA:

Dubbed "*the divorce coach*," Christina's work has been highlighted by local, national and international publications and has gained attention for her participation in the British Channel 4 series, "How to Divorce Without Screwing up Your Kids". In 2008, she led an initiative for children of divorce when invited to speak to Scotland's First Minister and members of Scottish Parliament. She has also worked closely with the family lawyer group, Resolution, to make informational workshops available for separated parents across England and Wales. Described as an inspirational and engaging speaker, Christina trains lawyers, mediators and counselors nationally and internationally. Her recently released parent handbook, *Separate Yet Successful*, is soon to be followed by the publication of her book, *Parenting Apart*, scheduled for a 2010 fall release by Penguin Books. www.divorceandchildren.com