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6 Summer Vacation Tips for Divorced or Separated Parents



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It's an annual rite of Spring — children are eagerly anticipating the end of the school year and the start of their summer break. The same can't be said for a number of divorced or separated parents. Summer vacation can deteriorate into a very stressful, chaotic and combative time for parents who share custody as well as a confusing time for their children. This nightmarish scenario can be avoided. Here are some tips to help create peace and ensure that your children have a fun summer.

Plan ahead: To avoid last-minute disagreements, parents should discuss and come up with a vacation schedule. Most separation agreements or Court Orders set out what time each parent has with the children during the summer. This can simplify this time of year for those families, but the agreements or Orders often set out deadlines by which you must notify the other parent of your vacation. If you don't make timely decisions, you can lose your right to have priority in the selection of exclusive time with the children.

Communicate trip details: During the school break planning phase, travel may be a significant consideration. Proper communication with the other parent is essential. When a parent leaves the state with a child, it is important that the other parent be notified in advance unless your agreement or Order states otherwise. If you don't share your vacation plans, you can face legal action from your ex or soon-to-be ex. You should confirm transfers in writing. A text or email will do. Something as simple as "Yes, I agree we'll meet at the library at 4pm on July 2nd" will significantly minimize family tension.

Cover your bases: If a parent plans on taking the children out of the country, passports must be in order and generally both parents must give their written notarized permission for the children to leave the country. Parents should also discuss whether or not to take children to countries that may not be considered safe environments to visit. Whether a particular country or region is considered safe could change from the time the plans are made to the time of the actual trip.

Some parents are particularly concerned about visits to countries that do not recognize the Hague Convention on International Child Abduction. The Convention seeks to prevent international child abduction and provide a legal framework for the return of children who have been abducted in violation of a valid Court Order. If a parent takes a child to a country that does not recognize the Convention, there may be no processes in place to require that parent to return the child.

Make a checklist: Parents need to be sure that anyone taking the child abroad has copies of health insurance and immunization documentation, and adequate supplies of any of the child's regular medications. It's a simple common courtesy for the non-traveling parent to be given an itinerary of the trip—and often the provision of this information may be part of an agreement or Court Order.


Don't make it a competition: When you are coming up with vacation plans, don't turn it into a competition with the other parent. Children value quality time over fancy trips and they don't care about which parent takes them on a beach vacation. A trip to the zoo or tubing on a nearby river can be just as exciting as a fancy vacation. Regardless of their family situation, children just want to be with their parents and have fun. Above all, they want to be happy and not be subject to the tensions that may accompany a separation or divorce.

Prepare the children: Once parents have agreed to a plan, they should then jointly communicate it to the children. This will help the children understand that the schedule is something that the parents came up with together. Remind your children that even though they won't see you for several days, they will have fun and you are happy they can spend time with their other parent. Likewise, take care of yourself when the children are gone by staying busy and treating yourself to something you might not be able to do when the children are around.

Keeping your children's best interests in mind and working together cooperatively with the other parent will go a long way in helping you provide your children with a fun, safe and organized summer vacation.

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