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Don't let divorce sour the holidays

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[Neal Augenstein](#), wtop.com

WASHINGTON -- Divorce is difficult for children and their parents at any time of the year, but the potential for stress multiplies exponentially around Christmas.

"The holidays are just a battleground -- a tug-of-war between the parents," says family law attorney Alan Plevy, of Vienna, Va.-based SmolenPlevy.

Specifying ahead of time which parent will have custody of the children during the long holiday break can help prevent tension and anger from creeping into what is traditionally a family-based holiday.

And do it in writing, says the lawyer.

"E-mail is a wonderful way to communicate because you have a record of what's been said," he says.

Even in intact families, more than a week of holiday togetherness can test a child or parent.

"The kids are off from school, they don't have things to do, perhaps they get bored at home, and that creates stress," he says.

Plevy suggests soon-to-be-exes put their differences aside long enough to confer on gifts for their children.

"Don't go into competition with the other parent. It doesn't work. It hurts," Plevy says, adding that divorcing parents shouldn't give gifts with the expectation the child will use it in a certain way.

"This is *their* gift, that they can take to Mommy's house or Daddy's house. You can't say, 'You have to keep it here at my house.'"

Parents should take into consideration their ex's desires in choosing gifts for their children.

Plevy recalls cases where parents made foolish decisions.

"The children show up at the custodial parent's house -- where they're living most of time -- with a puppy. They don't want a puppy. If they wanted a puppy they would have gotten one."

Despite the current stress, Plevy says caring parents should strive to help children look forward again to the holiday.

"This is a new time to start new traditions," which give the children stability, he says.

"It gives them something to think about from year to year, and it helps them grow up."

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