



# Psychotherapy and Life Coaching

## for Children, Teens, and Women

## Divorce During the Holidays

December 2009

The next month or so of holidays can be joyful, but also quite stressful. **This is particularly true for children and their parents in the various stages of divorce.**

Children often must divide their time between parents for the holidays. For other families, one parent's absence is painfully obvious, with increased sensitivity to that absence at this time of year. In either case, this is certainly not the joy envisioned for children on vacation.

**Parents experience similar pain, having to watch their children leave at a time they yearn to be with them.** The idea of sending their children with ex-spouses and, in some cases, new blended families can be difficult to accept.

**Mindful parenting is particularly important during the holidays.** Mindful parenting is simply paying close attention to your child's feelings and behaviors at any given moment. Mindful parenting is also "tuning in" to your child. Mindful parenting means staying in the present moment, rather than engaging in the same old conflicts with an ex-spouse. **Children need to be spared from overhearing frustrations about the other parent.** Past hurts or future fears, which often arise as we take stock of our lives at the end of the year, are best shared with trustworthy adults—away from the children.

Mindful parents are in a better position to help their children find ways to cope with the painful aspects of the holidays. **Parents can remind children about the good things** (e.g. "At least you don't have to make your bed at dad's house" or "Your mom always makes those yummy cookies this time of year."). **Parents can come up with just the right mantras or funny thoughts to lighten their children's moods** (e.g. "Dad's just a



### Just remember...

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phone call away" or "I get to play reindeer games with mom later.").

The best gifts parents can give their children are their love and encouragement to enjoy themselves. **At times, children just need to know they aren't being disloyal to one parent when they enjoy time with the other parent.**

**Both parents and children may need to be reminded that how holidays are celebrated matters more than the particular day they are celebrated.** Parents who are alone on a holiday have the opportunity to see a new movie (without talking animals!). Beginning new traditions will help both parents and children look forward to the holidays and at the same time let go of the past. Ultimately, children's joy this season will be the best gift for everyone. After all, they aren't children forever.

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