



# Surviving the Holidays

Divorce makes the usually stressful and overactive holidays even more difficult: If you're separated or divorced, these top ten tips can help you unload the dread, anxiety, or loneliness for a time of inner peace, hope, and even a little joy. *If you're related to, or a friend of, someone who's divorced, these will also help you help them!*

## **( 1 ) Have realistic expectations.**

Don't expect this year to be like others. Visualize divorce as being a "heart attack" and that can help you approach the season with much more balance. After a 'heart attack', one needs more rest, must drop some former activities, and listens to the body for clues of *how far you can push yourself*. **The holidays will come again every year.** There *will* be new good times . . . count on it.

## **( 2 ) Know you may stay home this year.**

You may feel like isolating and staying at home which is a normal part of grief and healing. But some may push you to get out. *Stop feeling sad! Come be happy with us!* If you are wallowing in self-pity, you may need to wash your face, spritz on some cologne, and force yourself to go. If you're ambushed by emotions at the party, you can politely leave. Take care of yourself. But if you are genuinely overwhelmed and need the security of solace, give yourself permission to stay in.

## **( 3 ) Do something special for yourself.**

St. Thomas Aquinas said one of the five remedies for sadness is to treat yourself to something you like. Go to a good movie, do a little window shopping, drop into Church for short adoration, or enjoy a special treat. It doesn't have to be lavish. This is not selfishness; it can be a small foretaste of the joys of heaven.

## **( 4 ) Try to do something for someone else.**

One of the best ways to come out of our misery is to help someone else. You can volunteer at school, church, or at a community shelter. But it's also okay if all you can manage is simply remembering to get your kid's Christmas presents before Christmas Eve.

**( 5 ) Keep it simple.**

Having a Christmas tree may cheer you up, but for others it will be too depressing. Sending Christmas cards can be very therapeutic, but for some it is yet another time-consuming and unnecessary expense. **Re-examine everything you used to do** during the holidays, keep what works, and get rid of the rest. Divorce can help you reorder your life in better ways you never realized.

**( 6 ) Keep in touch with the kids.**

Children crave routine and rituals which give them a sense of security—especially holiday customs. Try to keep as many of the holiday routines that they best love. Instead of the expensive annual ski trip, popcorn and Christmas movies can become a new family tradition. You need to listen to and affirm them, but you have the final word. Use common sense.

**( 7 ) Don't think you *must* celebrate with your ex.**

If tensions are high and the divorce is new, trying to force a family Christmas may often confuse everyone, especially the kids. Try your best to be kind and supportive and get together if you think it's best, but don't force it. Christmas can't cover the real problems. Next year will probably be different.

**( 8 ) Help the children buy a present for their other parent.**

Help them pick or make a gift for others, but don't be tempted to take credit for this generosity by adding your name to the gift tag. Let the child take credit. Stay anonymous. The Lord sees what you do in secret.

**( 9 ) Consider true sacrifice.**

Why not give the other parent Christmas Eve AND all of Christmas day and night, and stop trying to split it "in half" like Solomon's baby. Let that side of the family have *complete uninterrupted, joyful access to the kids* (like you would like to have!) You can "do presents" before or after, and then you get them next year.

**( 10 ) Go to Mass and rejoice in your heart.**

After divorce our wounded emotions can be fickle; it's our thoughts and beliefs that are meant to guide us. On Thanksgiving and Christmas days your emotions may be extremely tender; the tears may come and the cries of your heart may be muffled by the strains of "Silent Night". But come. Come as you are and enter into the supreme sacrifice of love Jesus made

on the cross. Know that there is hope—even when you can't sense or feel it. Believe it!

*O come let us adore Him.* God bless you.

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