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PREPARING FOR THE FESTIVE PERIOD

Christmas is a busy time for children and parents alike. With school finishing and thoughts turning to the festivities, it is important that arrangements regarding the children are made to work for everyone involved. For separated and separating parents, Christmas can be a difficult time. But careful planning can help make things run smoothly and ensure the children spend quality time with their parents and extended families.

Planning ahead

It may not feel like Christmas just yet, but discuss the children's holiday plans as early as possible. This will not only allow you to make arrangements with your employer in plenty of time, but also minimise any additional stress and animosity. It is often not just about the parents' Christmas plans - it is sometimes important to consider those of the extended family and friends too.

On the road

Travelling during the holidays can also present its own challenges, with increased amounts of traffic on the roads and other public transport issues to contend with. If the children need to travel to reach the other parent, timings should be carefully thought out.

Two Christmas days

If you live in the same area, consider sharing Christmas Day, with the children spending the morning with one parent before travelling to the other for Christmas lunch. If geography and other factors make this unworkable, arrange a 'fake Christmas', with the children seeing the other parent before or after Christmas Day. Ultimately it is about reaching an agreement that reflects what the children and parents are all happy with, having regard to what is in the children's best interests.

Communication

If you are struggling to reach an agreement with the other parent, think about contacting a mediator or a solicitor for advice and guidance. Teenager children might have their own ideas about what they want to do over the Christmas period, so it is also worth checking with them. Once arrangements are made, informing the children of the plan can help manage their expectations and reassure them that they will spend quality time with both parents.

Intercepting the list to Santa

Once the present wish list is ready, it would be useful to share its contents with the other parent and deciding between you who is going to buy which gift. Sharing the list with grandparents and other family members could also avoid the children opening the same present twice. Don't compete with the other parent - share the load and financial burden.

Christmas morning

Many children will be up at the crack of dawn, eager to look under the Christmas tree for those all-important presents. But it is helpful to remember that the other parent will be missing their children. Arranging a time for a telephone or video call with the children could help both parents feel involved in their children's Christmas morning.

What about next year?

With the decorations packed away, you probably feel it's too soon to start looking ahead to next Christmas. However, if you struggled to make arrangements for the children this year, cast an eye over the year ahead. Similarly, if part of the arrangements didn't work, then there is an opportunity to agree some changes for next year.

If you have any questions, or would like any information on family law, please contact: Megan Prideaux

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