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Keeping the clouds at bay - top tips for avoiding stress over the holidays

With the school holidays fast approaching, the prospect of juggling work, organising the children's free time and stretched finances can pose a challenge - especially for separated parents. What steps can you take to help minimise stress over the long summer break?

Review usual arrangements

Even if one parent normally has the children less frequently, it is common for parents to tweak arrangements over the school holidays. If you are trying to juggle work with looking after the children, this could be the perfect solution for all parties - including the children.

Plan ahead

Putting arrangements in place well ahead of time can help reduce tension within the family. Talk to the other parent about your expectations for the holiday period, listen to theirs and agree on how to split the time. Try using the school's calendar to agree dates in advance and, if difficult, consider attending mediation.

Travelling abroad

If you plan to take your children abroad, seek permission from anyone with parental responsibility. Parents travelling without permission could, if challenged, be accused of child abduction unless they have a current court order. Request a signed consent letter before booking any travel or accommodation. If faced with resistance, consider engaging a friend, relative, mediator or lawyer to negotiate on your behalf - and if in doubt, take advice.

Holiday packing

Taking the children's birth certificates with you can avoid issues at the border. If you are married but are using your maiden name, take your marriage certificate too. Check for specific travel requirements with the embassy in the country you are travelling to - for example, you can only travel to South Africa with a signed affidavit. If there is a court order in place which sets out arrangements for the children, take this too.

Communication

Being apart for longer than usual can be distressing for both children and parents. Provide details of where the children will be and how the other parent can get in touch in the event of an emergency. Consider planning in video or telephone calls - this could help put everyone at ease, while not encroaching on your quality time with the children.

Holiday clubs and activities

The holidays can be an expensive time for parents, with the cost of trips, kids' clubs and activities adding up. While child maintenance is the basic minimum that a parent is required to pay, the cost of extra items can also be shared. If you are both working, consider dividing some of these additional expenses to help relieve the burden on both households.

Extended family

Consider if there are family members - on either side - who can help with looking after the children. Grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins are often eager to spend time with the children and, while there are exceptions, it can be hugely beneficial for the children.

Being flexible

Playing 'piggy in the middle' is no fun for the kids. Keeping lines of communication open, being flexible and accommodating the children's needs will be beneficial to the children and can help foster an amicable long-term relationship - which might give you some extra leeway (or support) when you most need it.

For more information, or to discuss your family law needs, please contact:

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