

Keeping it Real

“To be in your children’s memories tomorrow, you have to be in their lives today.”
— Barbara Johnson

As a child of divorced parents, I am all too familiar with the tug of war that can come with the holidays. Thankfully, my parents planned out holidays so that I wasn’t spending the majority of my time in a car on Thanksgiving or Christmas, etc. However, when I think about the holidays as a child, I get sad. When I was with my dad, I wanted to be with my mom and when I was with my mom, I wanted to be with my dad. I never could fully just relax and enjoy the family, food, and laughter that everyone else was able to. My dad never remarried after my parents got divorced and to this day, at 43, to think of him alone on a holiday is difficult. He has always put on a brave face and told me he doesn’t mind it. But I do.

I remember the first time my daughter went with her father to celebrate Thanksgiving with his family. This was the first time I wouldn’t be with her on Thanksgiving. The first time I wouldn’t be with the people I now considered family on Thanksgiving. I was going to be alone. And I thought, how did my dad do this? I felt empty and alone and broken. It felt like part of me was missing. And she was. But I will always hope she never knows how hard that was for me.

Notice the similarities here? As a child of divorced parents, I was never fully happy during the holidays. As a divorced parent, I am never fully happy during the holidays. In fact, I dread parts of them. Like it or not, divorce affects everyone, family wide. One can act like it doesn’t and if it hasn’t yet, it will. Kids get older and begin to verbalize their feelings. They may not want to split days, leave town, or miss certain holidays with their loved ones, or leave their mom or dad.

I’ve been living these split holidays in one way or another for 38 years now. I have become all too familiar with the feelings, patterns, habits, and behaviors that go with them. As such, I ask you to consider the following:

1. Ask yourself if you are planning your child’s holiday activities based on what he or she wants? Or is it what you want?
2. Kids are fragile and intuitive little people. They can sense sadness and it hurts when they see that a parent is sad. Find your brave face and wear it like a crown. You will get through the hard times.
3. Remind yourself that you are the adult. Let your child be just that, a child. If your son or daughter wants to stay an extra hour with his or her dad, ask yourself whether it is a deal breaker.
4. Roll with the punches. Be flexible. Be fluid.
5. Communicate. It can be extremely difficult to communicate with an ex-spouse but remember, your child’s wants and needs come first. Communicate efficiently and without emotion.
6. Rise above. Not everyone is mature and levelheaded. If you are dealing with one of those people, take the high road. Your child will remember it.

Tis the season. Be grateful. Be centered. Be present.



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