

Holidays and child custody

What is usually recommended for child visitation and custody around holidays?

We feel it is important for children to experience and develop holiday traditions with each parent and extended family, and the family courts seem to hold the same opinion (in addition to the typically observed guidelines mentioned below). Regardless of the relationship that the parents have with each other, the children likely want to acknowledge holidays and other special days with both of them.

Holiday traditions involving travel and school schedules should be considered when dividing holiday time. If school or travel time creates issues with holiday time, longer duration visits may allow the children to participate fully in holiday activities with a parent or extended family members who require extensive travel to visit.

Parents spending a holiday with a child may wish to facilitate some contact (such as a phone call) with the other parent on the holiday or other significant day. Infants and toddlers may be unaware of the actual holiday celebration, and their presence at family gatherings is more for the adults. We've found that holidays are extremely important to younger children and provides them something positive to anticipate. Older adolescents and teenagers, on the other hand, may be less excited about holidays and holiday activities. Regardless, both parents should plan accordingly based upon the age(s) of those involved.

The holidays are stressful on their own, let alone working out an agreeable plan for visitation with your ex. We've seen many proposed plans over the years which seem fair and agreeable to everyone involved – the kids, mom, dad, and even extended family.

Here's an example of accommodations which have worked out successfully:

Thanksgiving

1. One parent has all or part of the 4-day (Thurs through Sunday) holiday period in even years, and the other parent has the same period in odd years.
2. One parent has Thanksgiving Day in even years, and the other parent has that day in odd years.
3. The child participates in activities with each parent during that Thursday through Sunday period.
4. No change from the usual schedule.

Christmas

1. One parent has the period from midday December 24 until midday on December 25 in even years, and the other parent has this period in odd years. The parent not having December 24-25 has the children from midday on December 25 until midday on December 26.
2. The child participates in activities with each parent during that same period.
3. No change from the usual schedule.

New Year's Eve and New Year's Day

1. One parent has the period from December 31 to January 1 in odd years and the other parent has the same period in even years.
2. One parent ends up with extra time during that 2-day period.
3. No change from the usual schedule.