

# Single Parent Networker

Ascension, Cathedral of the Holy Spirit,  
Corpus Christi, St. Anne, St. Mary, St. Joseph,  
Christ the King, and Spirit of Life

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## Handling Holidays After Divorce

By Jean McBride

Handling holidays and the expectations that accompany them about happy family times seem to be forever linked. Those expectations can create major stress for all families who are trying to handle holidays - not just divorced families.

Handling holiday celebrations is a challenge for most families. For divorced families, the stress meter can zing right off the charts. Along with tending to the requisite rituals of the season - school and church programs, baking, gifts, correspondence, and family gatherings, divorced parents find themselves living with a court document that dictates how holiday time with their children is to be spent. For most people that feels downright foreign.

Right now, before you do anything else, dig out your final orders and re-read what it says about handling holidays. You'd be surprised at how many people can't remember what they agreed to when it comes to handling holidays.

### How do Divorced Families Handle Holidays?

There are probably as many ways to handle holidays as there are divorced families. Ultimately the schedule that works for you will depend largely upon you and your child's other parent and the type of co-parenting relationship you have.

**Some families handle holidays by alternating each holiday.** It is quite common to allot one parent "even-year" holidays and the other "odd-year" holidays. Alternating holidays means you must deal with your disappointment about not spending every holiday with your children. You must get past the media hype that contributes to having unrealistic expectations about holidays. When you don't have your children with you, it is important for you to make plans to take care of yourself so your children don't worry about you. It is up to you to handle holidays in a healthy way for yourself when you aren't with your kids.

**Some families choose to split each holiday.** In this option for handling holidays, both parents get to spend some time with their children on each holiday. At the very least this option adds a parenting time transition to an already-jam-packed schedule. If seeing your child's other parent is exceptionally stressful for you or likely to involve a disagreement, this probably isn't the best option for your family. Some children can handle the chaos that accompanies frequent transitions between parents, while others simply can't. When you're making your plan, please think about your child's personality and what is going to work best for them.

**A smaller number of families choose to handle celebrations by spending**

**by spending the holidays together with their children.** These parents dig deep within themselves and manage to be at the same table with each other. For some parents, this actually works. But if there is even the slightest chance of negativity, hurt feelings, or "bad vibes" don't force yourself and your children into this option for handling holidays.

**Sadly, some parents don't see their children at all.** They don't handle holidays at all. For them holiday celebrations can be especially difficult because they can't help but think about their children and how sad it is not to be with them.

Each of these scenarios holds the potential of being extremely stressful. Here are some practical, easy to apply guidelines to help you and your family handle the holidays and enjoy a stress-free holiday season.

### Handling Holidays While Maintaining Your Grace and Sanity

Accept your parenting plan and choose to make the best of it as it is. Schedule your holiday plans around your parenting agreement. Create and enforce a conflict-free zone around yourself and your children. Really.

Focus on your time with your children instead of the time you aren't going to be together. Be ruthless about keeping your children out of the middle. Put your

Put your children first. This means not placing them in the terrible position of having to choose between parents. As the adults, find a way to work things out.

Start new family traditions for your family. Instead of trying to replicate your old family traditions, create something completely new. Here are a few ideas: Take your kids to help serve meals to the homeless; adopt a family that is less fortunate than you; have a potluck dinner in place of your regular holiday meal; have a winter picnic; have a family pajama day. (You get the idea - break out of old thinking and get creative.)

Be flexible. Find ways for everyone to "win". Holiday dates are much more important to adults than children. Children are usually quite happy celebrating a day or so late. In fact, depending on their age, your children may not even notice, for example, if you celebrate Thanksgiving on the day or the next day. And if it is a gift-giving holiday, what child is going to mind having two days to open presents instead of one?

Steer clear of engaging in the "I can provide a better holiday than you can" competition with your child's other parent. Instead focus on developing and enjoying a quality relationship with your child. Help your child make or purchase a gift for the other parent. Yes, I really mean this! By doing so you are demonstrating respect for the other parent. And in the process you are modeling thoughtful and gracious behavior for your child. If you receive a gift from your child that you know the other parent helped with, graciously receive it. I've heard horror stories of parents throwing gifts away right in front of their children just because they came from the other parent or the other parent's friend.

Stop trying to change or even influence your child's other parent. Chances are very good that it isn't going to happen. When it's all said and done, the only person you can change is yourself. The sooner you are able to accept this, the more peace of mind you'll have.

Take good care of yourself. Get enough sleep, don't skip your exercise routine, make sure you are eating well, make use of your support systems, and remember to breathe deeply every day. You will handle the holidays much more effectively when you practice good self care. And as an added bonus, you model good self care for your children, so they will also experience a stress-free holiday.

Be kind - to yourself, to your children, to your family, to your child's other parent, and to the many people you come in contact with on a daily basis. A little kindness can go a long way.

Expect the best outcome instead of the worst. Visualize yourself and your children having a wonderful, stress-free holiday - no matter how you spend it.

Jean McBride

[www.divorcehelpforparents.com/handling-holidays.html](http://www.divorcehelpforparents.com/handling-holidays.html)



### November 30th The First Sunday of Advent

Advent is a magical time of year. We know it's time to prepare for Jesus' coming, a time to celebrate light in the midst of darkness. All around us is a society of instant Christmas. Stores filled with lights, music and signs proclaiming buy now. At home we have the opportunity to remind everyone in our family that this is time of preparation for the presence of Emmanuel, God-with-us. As you decorate your Christmas tree take time to tell the stories of the decorations, the Christmas past and the stories of the birth of each child in the family.



## Parenting Pointers

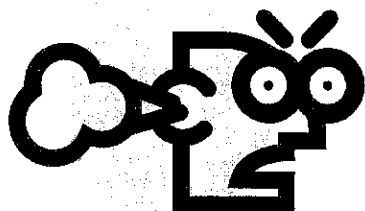
**597. Nov. 7: People are more important than buildings. Yet buildings shelter us. We gather in religious buildings to remind us of our faith and to worship together. Take a tour of a church with your child. Explain the artwork, symbols, holy objects, etc.**

**598. Nov. 14: As the season changes, so do people. Children grow. People die. We drop old habits and learn new ones. Discuss in your family one bad habit each of you would like to get rid of.**

**599. Nov. 21: (Thanksgiving is next week.) For most families Thanksgiving is a time to reconnect. It's also a time when in-laws often mix. Your children benefit from a healthy extended family. Seek to know at least one extended family member better next Thanksgiving weekend. Don't fight. Bite your tongue if you must. Can you find anything positive to say about a black sheep in your family? Do it for the sake of your child.**

**600. Nov. 28: As we get ready to start a new liturgical year with Advent, discuss with your family one new habit each of you would like to develop between now and Christmas. Let lighting a candle on your Advent wreath be a time to remind you of your resolve to begin again to be a better person.**

Used with permission by Susan Vogt, [www.SusanVogt.net](http://www.SusanVogt.net)



## Anger

Some of us express it outwardly.  
Some of us keep it inside.

We all wish we could handle it better.

Even if we think anger is an emotion we can control, it can suddenly be felt or come out when we least expect it, whether we are widowed, divorced or separated.

We are angry because we feel pushed into situations we did not want or plan in our lives. We are forced to make big changes and deal with things we might have taken for granted because maybe our spouse handled that responsibility in the past or we had worked together to plan and do what needed to be done.

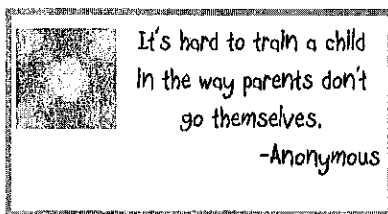
There are so many things we struggle with: Figuring out finances and paying bills. Keeping on top of house and utility decisions and payments. Having to downsize. Yard work. House maintenance. Doing laundry. Cooking meals. Packing school lunches. Fixing the car. Dealing with the legal system for divorces or settling estates. Juggling transportation needs for kids or grandkids. Having sick kids, or we're ill.

So many thoughts race through our minds and upset us: Why is life so messed up? Why now? Why did you have to go? Why did I put up with all that for so long? Why couldn't we have longer? Why must you show off your new spouse? Why did you treat me so badly? How can I ever get over grieving your loss? How will I ever find someone who treated me as well as you did? Why did you die so suddenly? Why did you suffer so long? Why didn't you share more information and teach me how to do things when you were still here? How will we ever settle this court case? How can you treat me so badly? What will this do to the kids? Why are you so intent to ruin my life? How can I live my life without you?

Often we target our anger at a higher entity. Psalm 22 comes to mind: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? ... O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest."

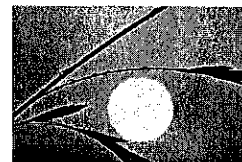
God has not forsaken you, and His love and care for you remain forever. You are not alone in your anger, nor do you need to deal with this by yourself. May God help you find the inner peace you seek.

Used with Permission: Elaine Shein



It's hard to train a child  
In the way parents don't  
go themselves.

-Anonymous



These are the few  
ways we can practice  
humility:



**These are the few  
ways we can practice  
humility:**

To speak as little as  
possible of one's self.

To mind one's own

business.

Not to want to manage other  
people's affairs.

To accept contradictions and  
correction cheerfully.

To pass over the mistakes of others.

To accept insults and injuries.

To accept being slighted, forgotten  
and disliked.

To be kind and gentle even under  
provocation.

Never to stand on one's dignity.

To choose always the hardest."  
— Mother Teresa, *The Joy in Loving:  
A Guide to Daily Living*



## GRACE FOR THANKSGIVING DAY MEAL

**Leader:** The Lord is bounteous with His blessing.

**All:** To Him belongs our Thanksgiving.

O Lord, Almighty God, You do not cease to give us many graces and riches, especially this food from the earth that we share today, that nourishes and gives life. We thank You for the fruits and blessings of this land. We thank You for our family and friends gathered at his holiday table. We pray You will continue to bless and preserve us with the goodness of Your grace. Help us to be mindful of the needs of others as we share this meal and rejoice with our family.

We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.



Reach Out: Parish To Family, Fran Hauck, Family Life Office, Archdiocese of Boston, 1995 Used with permission.

Taken from Faith and Fest 2004 the Catholic Archdiocese of Omaha

### **Beginning Experience:**

Separated, Divorced, Widow  
Tara at 701-426-8303

Level I—Charity Lutheran

Level II—Faith Lutheran

Level III—Good Shepherd

Each level is 10 weeks. All levels run concurrently. See website below.

### **Children's Beginning Experience:**

Susan at 1-701-258-3152

Free Preschool for 3&4 year olds for eligible families; contact BECEP at 701-323-4400 for school year.

**Caring for Children Program**—health coverage to uninsured children. 1-800-342-4718. [www.ndcaring.org](http://www.ndcaring.org)

### **Single File Newsletter**

For information  
[www.bismarcksinglefile.com](http://www.bismarcksinglefile.com)

### **Parish Information:**

Cathedral—222-2259  
St. Anne—223-1549  
Ascension—223-3606  
St. Mary- 223-5562  
Corpus Christi—255-4600  
Spirit of Life-663-1660  
Christ the King -663-8842  
St. Joseph -663-9562

### **Office of Family Ministry—Diocese of Bismarck—**

Joyce McDowall 701-204-7209  
Toll Free 1-877-405-7435  
[www.bismarckdiocese.com](http://www.bismarckdiocese.com)  
[jmcdowall@bismarckdiocese.com](mailto:jmcdowall@bismarckdiocese.com)

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**If you would like your name removed from the mailing list, please call your parish coordinator**

**Parents Forever-Education for Families in divorce Transition**, call NDSU Parent Resource Center, 667-3342 or 667-3340

### **WEBSITES THAT MAY BE OF INTEREST:**

- [www.celebratesimply.com](http://www.celebratesimply.com)
- [www.bereavementmag.com](http://www.bereavementmag.com)
- [www.beginningexperienceofwesternnorthdakota.org](http://www.beginningexperienceofwesternnorthdakota.org)
- [www.vibrantfaithathome.org](http://www.vibrantfaithathome.org)
- [www.uscch.org](http://www.uscch.org)

[www.fambooks.com/moms.htm](http://www.fambooks.com/moms.htm)  
[www.singleparents.about.com](http://www.singleparents.about.com)  
[www.bridgetobenefits.org](http://www.bridgetobenefits.org)