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Level-Up Your Holiday Co-Parenting

Co-parenting can be difficult on the best of days. The holidays present new challenges for co-parents. In this article, you'll find a few different ways to "level-up" your co-parenting relationship this holiday season. Many of the parents who end up in court over the holiday season fail the basic idea of the holidays: giving.

I do feel the need to add a little disclaimer. Co-parenting is hard! Whether you have a narcissist as a co-parent or not, it is frustrating to try to co-parent with a non-cooperating co-parent. This can be seen in parents who take but never give and only "level-up" to look better in court. Impressions are everything for some people, but consistency is what matters for the kids.

Many of the tools you can use to level up can be used without the cooperation of the co-parent. Hopefully, many of these tools will also better the co-parenting relationship. It is difficult to do things together when your co-parent rebuffs every goodwill gesture. In this case, it is important to safeguard the time with your children and do your best to not let their toxicity affect you and your children.

Set and enforce boundaries while still showing your child that it is okay for them to love the other parent. The happier the kids are, the better the holiday memories will be, even if you're dealing with a scrooge.



Whether you are just beginning your co-parenting relationship or looking for new ideas, below are a few ways to celebrate this year.

Level 1

Compromise time. Sometimes, co-parenting feels like all you are doing is giving time away with the little people you want to spend time with the most. Experts say to consider flexibility in co-parenting as a gesture in goodwill. Instead of trading hard times with your ex, work with them. This year is your Christmas Eve, but most of your family activities don't happen on that day? If it means a lot to your co-parent, this is a great time to invest some goodwill in this platonic partnership. Inevitably, you will need them to work with you too.

Do you have a holiday parenting plan?

The best way to prevent conflict is to plan your parenting-time *ahead* of time. This allows both parents to plan with their respective families. Even with parenting plans, flexibility and compromise are important tools year-round.



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Level 2

Gift giving is a special expression of celebrating the season, ritual, and family values. Arguably, there are many "levels" within this idea based on how co-parenting families choose to do gift giving. In any capacity below, this is a great step toward modeling a healthy co-parent relationship for your child. One or a combination of the following is great to show your kiddos you care:

- Give a gift from your child to your co-parent. Make a gift together or buy one
- Give a gift from you to your co-parent
- Set a budget for the child between yourselves so it does not feel like a gift-giving competition
- Want to show a united front? Purchase bigger gifts together. For some families this means a laptop, bicycle, event tickets, or cell phone. The "from your parents" tag means a lot to the child because it shows both parents put them first. This can include separate, smaller gifts within your respective families.

Level 3

When possible, try to include the other parent in some holiday plans. Have a joint holiday dinner. You don't necessarily have to sit next to your ex or even across from them. The goal here is having your child see that the people that made them can co-exist. Creating an emotionally healthy environment is one of the best holiday gifts you can give to your child. Not ready to share the dinner table?

- Go see Santa or go to a holiday festival together
- Go together with your child to pick out a sibling's or shared family member gift
- Pick out a gift for a program near you that gives to the less fortunate
- Volunteer all together

Always remember that childhood is fleeting, and the values and experiences you impart on your children stay with them for a lifetime. Holidays have the ability to imprint positive memories on your child. It is up to you to make them stick.

If you are dealing with a difficult co-parent, we can help. Give us a call at 605-777-1772. Make the most out of this holiday season.

**This article is only intended to give general information and not specific legal advice. Consult with an attorney on your situation before taking any legal action.*