

Useful Contacts

Breathing Space

Tel: 0800 838 587

Line open Mon-Friday 6pm-2am, then 6pm Friday – 6am Monday

Parentline Scotland

Tel: 08000 28 22 33

Mon - Fri: 9am – 10pm/Sat - Sun: 12 noon – 8pm

www.children1st.org.uk/parentline



Christmas and the Modern Family

*A booklet for PARENTS to 'Surviving
Christmas' if you are separated or divorced.*

'Surviving Christmas' is a seasonal campaign run by PLUS Perth, a local mental health campaigning charity. To access our 'Surviving Christmas' pocket guide and other helpful resources, please visit www.mentalwealthperthshire.org.uk or call PLUS Perth on 01738 626242.

It is common in modern life for Christmas to be viewed as a time when the whole family gets together, but this can cause unnecessary complications and negative emotions if there has been a family breakdown or estrangement.

Separation, Divorce or Estrangement

Seasonal and festive holidays like Christmas can be really hard for parents who are divorced, separated or estranged from the rest of the family and for those who are not living with their children.

Non-resident parents can often feel jealous, lonely, sad, angry and resentful. Separated and estranged families may feel as though everyone else is enjoying the perfect family festivities, while they feel more isolated and alone than during the rest of the year.

What can you do?

It is important to decide who the children should be with well before Christmas, if this is not done it can lead to a lot of unnecessary pain. It will allow time to come to terms with what is happening and to plan ahead. You could suggest an arrangement of alternating years, so you get to spend Christmas Day with your children every other year.

It is important to make sure that you keep your focus on the children when planning and to give older children a say in what happens at Christmas, as it can cause problems in the future.

For children who have lost contact with a parent, Christmas can bring about painful memories, feelings of loss and upset. If you realise that this could be the case, try and talk to them about them in an open, supportive and uncritical way. Appreciate that whatever your experiences or feelings of loss with the absent parent, for a child, their relationship and experiences are different.

It is good to use extra Christmas contact time for visiting extended family. When couples break up, children can often miss out on close relationships that they previously enjoyed with grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins in the normal routine of contact arrangements. Christmas is the perfect time to rekindle these valuable relationships

If you have the children

Remember it can be a time of sadness for the other parent, so being kind to the other and being flexible can help ease the difficulty. You could try to encourage your children to call the other parent on Christmas Day.

If you are alone

Some non-resident parents are sad that they can't watch their children open their presents at Christmas. From a legal point of view, it can be very frustrating for non-resident parents if the resident parent doesn't grant access over Christmas, but it may be possible to come to an informal arrangement. If you find yourself in this situation, you could try and arrange your own 'Christmas Day' either before or after your children are away.

See if you can make arrangements with your friends. If anyone close to you is in the same situation, why not organise to see them; volunteer or invite them round for lunch so that you will not be by yourself.

It can be heart breaking to explain that their other parent won't be visiting over Christmas but it will be kinder if you remain positive and try not to criticise him or her too much in front of the children, no matter how angry you feel.