



COLLABORATIVE
PRACTICE

Resolving Disputes Respectfully

Give Your Children The Gift of A Conflict-Free Christmas



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I am writing a follow-up to the letter to the Editor in the Booster on November 25, 2011. Gary Drenfeld, a social worker from Ontario, wrote that all the kids want for Christmas is freedom from conflict – a gift that will last a lifetime. Wouldn't that be a special gift for your children?

When parents talk about how they will share holidays and special occasions, many parents express that they simply want to "share holidays by mutual agreement", leaving the exact allocation of time to a discussion closer to the actual holiday. Let me tell ya...there's a reason why I and many family lawyers/mediators discourage this level of generality. It is not unusual for family lawyers to get numerous panic-ridden calls in December about holiday plans gone wrong.

For the Christmas holiday, as well as other holidays or special days throughout the year, PLAN PLAN PLAN. When you're figuring out what the regular schedule is, why not define what "Christmas" sharing would look like. Does it mean the entire 2-week school holiday? Does it mean December 23rd to the 26th? Some parents will alternate years, for instance, however you define "Christmas", maybe mom will have the first ½ in even years, and dad will have the first ½ in odd years. You should define all holidays and special occasions throughout the year in this manner. Does Easter extend to Monday, or just to Sunday?

Why not plan all of this in advance, effectively avoiding the discussion, and the potential for conflict. If you are unable to plan in this manner, I recommend that you set a date at least 1

½ months before the particular holiday to talk with your ex so that if there is a conflict about time allocation, you know early enough to figure a way to solve it before the week of. If a conflict does arise, which turns into a power struggle of sorts, just remember...you will get what you give. If you give reasonable flexibility when requested, you will likely receive the same flexibility in return. Hey...if you don't, you'll know for next time that you need to be a bit more stringent. This is human nature.

Did you plan for the holidays early? Did your kids appreciate the advance notice? How did you deal with conflict that arose? Share your stories with me – send me an email or follow me on Twitter at @stephaniecollab and send me a tweet. I want to hear from you! Find archives of my articles on www.kindrachukdobson.com.

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