

# JCCCA

## Parent Page

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## Two Homes for the Holidays

By Andria Sparer

Holidays can be a time to anticipate with excitement and happiness, or with anxiety and sadness, depending on what is happening in your life and family. For children of separated and divorced parents, the holidays are often a time of mixed emotions. Karen Grais Meyer, MSW, LCSW, a licensed clinical social worker with Counseling Connection, offers some common feelings children have.

There is an uncertainty about where they will be spending the holidays. For children whose parents have separated since the previous holiday season, they may not know where they will be spending Thanksgiving, the first night of Chanukah, and/or Christmas. It is unsettling for them not to know about when they will be with Mom, Dad, grandparents and cousins for the holidays. Have a plan in place for the holidays at least one month in advance, and share that plan with the children.

"I wish I could split myself in two." It is natural for children to want things to be "the same" as in the past, which means being with both parents for the holidays. While there are eight nights of Chanukah, and Christmas can be shared as

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, Thanksgiving is one day with one big meal or it is divided between two parents. Dividing a one-day holiday between two homes can be overwhelming. Be understanding if your child expresses sadness that the holidays may not be "as good as" they were before, but emphasize that while the holidays may not be the



same, they can still be good. Some families have found that it works better when one parent celebrates the holiday on the day before or after the actual holiday, while others family traditions can be maintained in each parent's home and each extended family. Each situation is different; remember to factor in your child's needs as well as the tradition when considering your options.

"When I'm with my mom, I miss my dad, and when I'm with my dad, I miss my mom." While this is a common feeling of children — especially young ones — during times of separation throughout the year, this feeling may be most intense during the holidays. Be aware that your child may be missing the parent he/she is not with

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on a holiday; ensure that the child has contact with that parent, such as by telephone, if at all possible.

Keep in mind that the holidays are part of a "season", and most of them are not just one day; therefore, there are many opportunities during the holiday season to carry on traditions that the family has enjoyed, such as visiting Santa, decorating the tree, having a Chanukah party, and the like.

## Beware this Holiday Season

*-Some holiday plants are poisonous.*

Contrary to popular myth, poinsettias aren't poisonous to humans. The real danger this season is mistletoe — ingesting it can cause severe stomach cramps and diarrhea and can even be fatal. If you decide to hang a sprig over your doorway, make sure it's well secured and that it won't be knocked to the floor where a pet or young child could happen upon it. Holly and pyracantha (also known as firethorn), both of which are frequently used in holiday decorations, are toxic as well — keep them out of reach.

*- Lead may lurk in unexpected places*

Like nearly all appliance cords, most strings of Christmas tree lights are coated with plastic that contains lead. The amount of lead varies widely, and it's hard to say how dangerous it might be. To be safe, don't let your child handle the lights. Lead is also a concern if you have an artificial tree that's old or that was made in China. Some of these trees may contain unsafe levels of lead and give off dust that can spread lead through the air. Throw out any suspect artificial trees and replace them with either the real thing or a modern imitation. When

buying an artificial tree, check for lead warning labels.

## 4 Germ-Fighting Tips

Hand washing is The Number One Way to outsmart cold and flu bugs -- but it's not the only way. With these easy tips in your germ-fighting arsenal, those bugs don't stand a chance.

1. Make bubbles. You've probably heard about having your kid sing "Happy Birthday" twice so he washes long enough, and that's good. But it's the friction that really matters. So teach him to scrub hard enough to whip up some suds, then send those germs down the drain.
2. Sanitize smartly. In a pinch, squeeze on the hand sanitizer, but read the label carefully before you choose one. An effective hand sanitizer needs to have at least 60 percent alcohol to kill bugs.
3. Spot-clean. It's not dirt that you are looking for, it's germs. Paying attention to the high-traffic areas where germs linger, like countertops, phones, and doorknobs, is more important.
4. Wipe on. Love wipes? A new study discovered that wipes used in hospitals transferred bacteria from one surface to the next. An easy fix? Use each wipe on only one surface, and then toss it.

## Speed It Up

Teach your baby the difference between fast and slow with this little game: First, stroll around your house slowly holding her in your arms. Then, increase the movement by taking big, exaggerated marching steps. Finally, break into a little jog (be sure to watch where you're going so you don't trip over the Exersaucer in the kitchen). She'll

love anticipating the different tempos and will delight in the movement.

## Family Tree

Don't limit your tree-trimming traditions to your evergreen. Transform Dad into a decorated Christmas tree in this hilarious after-dinner activity. Supply your kids with green and red crepe paper, aluminum foil, and masking tape. When they're done, gather 'round the tree and take a photo to add to your family album or send as next year's holiday card.

## Make an Album

Start a tradition with your child. Get a small photo album (the 4" x 6" plastic booklets from the photo store are perfect), and gather individual snapshots of all the people you want to include. Put the photo on the right, and on the left insert a 4" x 6" index card with a word or two identifying that person (Grandma, Uncle George, and so on). Kids love to look at pictures, and it will also help your child remember who's who.

## My Provider is Special because...

What makes your provider special to your child and your family? We would like to hear from you.

Send a small paragraph telling us the name of your provider along with your nomination describing their outstanding performance and efforts to:

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