# Navigating Christmas and Parenting Arrangements: A guide for separated parents

written by Tilly Ryan | 21 November 2023



As the festive season approaches, the holiday spirit fills the air, and many families eagerly anticipate spending quality time together. For separated parents, however, navigating Christmas and parenting arrangements can be a complex and emotionally charged task. In this article, we have explored the essential considerations for separated parents during this festive time, focusing on the 6 'P's – Planning and Preparation, Prioritising the child's well-being, Pets, Positivity, and Proactive communication.

## PLANNING AND PREPARATION

To ensure a smooth and joyful holiday season, planning and preparation are crucial. Start early by discussing and organising arrangements for your child's Christmas celebrations. By having a well-thought-out plan, children can look forward to their holiday season with less uncertainty. Clearly define when and where they will spend time with each parent, ensuring that they can enjoy holiday traditions and the anticipated visit from Santa Claus. Adequate preparation minimises the likelihood of disputes and disagreements, promoting a peaceful and harmonious Christmas for all.

## PRIORITISE YOUR CHILD'S WELL-BEING

The primary goal of co-parenting during the holidays should always be to prioritise your child's well-being. It's important to remember that Christmas is a time of joy and togetherness, not a competition between parents. Avoid making your child feel like they must choose between their parents or compare the two homes. Instead, put your child's needs first and, when appropriate and safe, involve them in the discussion about what makes Christmas special to them. Their input can help create a more child-centred and enjoyable holiday experience.

## PETS: A SOURCE OF COMFORT AND COMPANIONSHIP

The festive season coincides with school holidays, which means children are spending more time at home. This can be an ideal time for your child to have their beloved pet around. Pets provide comfort and companionship, making the holiday season even more special. If both parents have a pet-friendly environment, consider allowing your child to take their pet between homes during the holidays, provided it's in the best interest of the pet's welfare. And remember, when it comes to pets, getting a pet shouldn't be a spur of the moment decision nor should a pet be purchased to 'win over' a child – if you are thinking of buying your child a pet, think about the practicalities of this and the care of the pet, including when the child is with the other co-parent. If after careful consideration you are keen to consider a pet, why not speak to the friendly staff at the Animal Welfare League of Queensland (AWLQ) for guidance about what pet may be suitable in your circumstances.

# POSITIVE APPROACH

While Christmas is a time for joy and celebration, it can also be stressful and emotionally challenging for many people, including separated parents. It's essential to maintain a positive attitude and avoid speaking negatively about the other co-parent or their family, especially in front of your child. Keep your child's best interests at the forefront and approach the festive season with a sense of positivity, even if you are going through a difficult time. Your child's emotional well-being should be protected from any parental disputes or negative sentiments during this special time of year. This includes making sure your family and friends are also respectful of your ex-partner when dealing with your child – they may have strong opinions, but it is important that your child is not included in any negative or adult conversations.

# PROACTIVE COMMUNICATION

Be proactive with your co-parent about the Christmas season. Review the existing parenting arrangements to see what is stipulated for Christmas. Remember, if you have Orders or a Parenting Plan that set out your parenting arrangements, communicate clearly with your co-parent to ensure everyone is following the agreed times so that there are no unexpected disagreements. You may both agree to deviate from the terms of the Orders, but this must be by agreement – you can't just do what you want without regard for your co-parent. Ultimately if you have Orders and you cannot agree on a change to the parenting arrangements, then you need to follow the terms of the Orders.

If you are seeking to deviate from the plans and can't come to an agreement, try to seek legal guidance as soon as possible so that you can proactively minimise confusion or disagreement, and if necessary, any arguments can be amicably resolved. A proactive approach to communication can lead to amicable resolutions, ensuring a smoother Christmas for all involved.

Things can feel overwhelming, and you may not know where to begin in planning for Christmas with your co-parent. It might be your first Christmas following your separation and you may feel anxious about the festive season. Whatever your circumstances, reach out to the SR Family Law team for guidance and support. We will work with you to try and resolve any disputes to allow everyone to have a safe and joyous festive season.

Remember that Christmas and parenting arrangements for separated parents can be challenging, but with careful planning, prioritising your child's well-being, considering the role of pets, maintaining positivity, and proactive communication, you can navigate this festive season successfully. The goal for separated parents is to create a warm and loving environment for your child during the holidays, allowing them to cherish the magic of the season, regardless of your family's structure.

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