



Planning is important for Christmas in two Homes

from the Orangeville Banner, December 10, 2013

Christmas can be a wonderful time of year for children.

There is a promise of snow bringing many hours of outdoor enjoyment building snowmen, tobogganing, skiing and skating.

There is also time spent with extended family and close friends.

Along with that is an anticipated visit from Santa Claus and, for Christians, a deeper celebration of the birth of Jesus.

For children with parents in two homes, Christmas can still be a wonderful time as long as parents coordinate the time so that children spend time with each of them and, where desired, each parent's extended family.

The following are some tips that might help parents who reside in separate homes.

1. Have discussions about how you'll share the holidays well in advance.

While many parents choose to split Christmas Day so that each parent has part of the day along with either Christmas Eve or Boxing Day, this may not be practical for all families.

Some families travel to spend time with extended family, so parents may want to take travel time into consideration when determining how to share their time.

Flexibility is key, as Christmas Day doesn't always fall neatly in the middle of the school break and children may move back and forth between homes during the break.

2. As new homes are established, so too are new traditions that each parent can start with their children.

Traditions can include purchasing a new Christmas ornament each year, attending the annual tree lighting ceremony at Kaycee Gardens, attending a Christmas Eve church service, or tobogganing down some of the local hills.

3. Coordinate gift giving, such as advising each other of plans to purchase "big ticket" items.

Perhaps parents can share the cost of expensive presents, or if one parent provides a pricier gift, the other parent can give a few less expensive ones.

It is also important to remember that parents should never compete with each other to provide children with the bigger, better gifts.

If one parent can afford to provide more expensive gifts than the other, there should be no hard feelings.

Each parent is a valuable part of their children's lives, and it is not the "stuff," but the gift of time, that is most important to their children.

4. Help your children purchase gifts for the other parent until they are old enough to purchase gifts themselves.

Jointly, parents can decide how much money they should spend on each other.

The thoughtfulness of providing each other a gift from your children can help affirm that both of you continue to value the other parent's importance in the lives of your children.

Remember that however you choose to share your children this holiday season, it doesn't matter how much time you have or whether you have Christmas Day, Boxing Day or another day within the break.

What matters is how you choose to spend that time with your children.

Tina Hinsperger is an accredited family mediator and a custody/access assessor in private practice. She also regularly facilitates workshops on Positive Parenting from Separate Homes and is a presenter with the Mandatory Information Program (MIP).