

## Better Parenting: 16 Ways Holidays Can Be Brighter For Split or Divorced Families

By Sonia Spackman MA, MFT

Most kids picture happy holidays where dreams come true. Yet, for some kids whose parents are divorced or separated the holidays can be a nightmare. We will explore 16 ways parents can help.

**NOTE: This column covers 7 of the 16 Ways. You can pick up the complete list at the Vernonia library on the counter. Or e-mail me soniaspackman@msn.com.**

### 1. TAKE TIME AWAY IF YOU HAVE TO

As parents we need to adjust to being divorced or separated and try to begin a new life. Don't be surprised if this doesn't happen right away. Time may be required to patch over differences and hard feelings. Rather than being thrown together before you are ready you might find it easier to be away and celebrate a second holiday after the holiday.

You are still a parent and taking care of the kids during the divorce or separation crisis is your first priority. *Maybe you can get help from a close relative or friend, who can help you get through the holidays until you are able to celebrate with your children.*

### 2. FOCUS ON GIVING, NOT WINNING

**Plan ahead** far in advance with your ex-spouse and your kids if you can, so that your ex doesn't feel under pressure.

**Prioritize** your wish list of

activities with dates and times that are most important to you.

**Communicate your wants** and needs without being pushy. Talk with your ex-spouse when it is convenient for both of you.

**Remain calm and respectful.** Listen carefully to discover exactly what your ex really wants. You might be able to make tradeoffs.

**Put the schedule in writing** as soon as you reach an agreement and give your ex a copy to mutually keep track of and prevent misunderstandings.

**Always have plan B.** Make an easy or simple alternative plan to replace activities that were scheduled, in case of an emergency, such as an illness. You will have less stress because you will be ready.

**Head off conflicts** by sticking to your agreement and being flexible with your plans if your ex asks you to, even at the last minute. Remember, "it is far better to give than to receive." (Because when you give, it will eventually come back to you in bigger dividend.)

### 3. SHARE THE TIME FOR SPECIAL HOLIDAYS AND BIRTHDAYS

Just because parents are divorced or separated it does not mean that the amount of holiday time doubles. *In reality, it means that each parent now only has half the time with the kids.*

Maybe you and your former spouse can meet with a family counselor, a mediator, or a neutral third party who can help you both reach a compromise if you are unable.

Some parents avoid splitting the holidays by alternating major holidays

yearly. This gives both parents time to relax with the kids and avoids the children feeling overwhelmed by being rushed between two houses for celebrations on the same day. Or if one parent is far away, Christmas can occur in July. It could be your celebration your way.

### 4. DON'T EXPECT YOUR KIDS TO LIKE A STEPPARENT OR STEP SIBLINGS

Kids need to be able to share how they feel. Don't force children to act happy if they are not. However, you can request that your child spend a brief period of time with the family. It may be helpful to stipulate certain requirements such as saying hello and being respectful.

### 5. INVOLVE KIDS TO ESTABLISH NEW HOLIDAY TRADITIONS

When you remarry or enter a new relationship with someone who has kids, discuss ways to get all the kids involved, even the kids that are not living with you. Have them share traditions they had in the past that they want to keep or change. Allow a child to have something they can do alone with their own parent. Ask them for ideas for new traditions they would like to try together as a remarriage family. *Whenever possible, let your children help make choices about when and where to celebrate the holidays, and with whom. However, before asking their opinions, make it clear that all plans must be cleared with everybody involved.* This will teach your kids to be part of the negotiation between the adults.

### 6. KEEP YOUR PROMISES

Around holidays and birthdays be extra careful to follow up on the plans you make with your kids.

### 7. STOP BEING STUBBORN

Parents in high-conflict divorces are so used to wanting to win they demand their own way. They put their kids in the position of being prisoners of war. Imagine what it must be like for a child to know full well that if his mother is happy, his father must be sad or vice versa. Is this the way you want your children to see you? Is this the way you want your children to act with others? Because you are modeling that there is no such thing as a compromise, only victory or defeat.

*Keep your eye on what is best for your children freeing them from the obligation to keep both mom and dad happy. Rather, be kind. Don't think of yourself. Don't worry what you will get in return. Be a role model for giving to your children, and your ex-spouse. Tell them that, in the spirit of the season you will organize your time with your children according to what is convenient for your ex-spouse and the children, and that you will support what they would like to do for the holidays, even spending more time with the other parent. Let them know that this will make you happy to see them happy.*

Good communication and a willingness to be generous for your child's sake is needed. Exchanging parenting time to allow participation may be the best gift you will give your child this holiday. *You will be promoting the selfless spirit of the season for your kids if you do.*

## Creature Comforts~Keeping Holidays Safe for Pets

By Victoria K. Guerrero

Nothing is more fun than involving pets in family celebrations, with festive photos of children, family, and pets all together safely enjoying each other. Despite best intentions however, holidays can pose extra dangers to pets. Here are a few of the potential hazards to keep in mind to help keep your pets safe.

Most pet owners are well aware of the habits of their pets, be them good or bad, but foraging in the trash is an old tradition for both dogs and cats, and can be very harmful. Keeping pets safe from the trash is a victory usually conquered in the puppy or kitten stage. During this busy time of year though, guests can throw off a family's routine as it can be busier than usual. Dangers lurk in the kitchen garbage, like interesting foods, and other objects pets have no business eating. Be that as it may, they do! It is no secret that a dog

has anywhere from 100 to 300 million sense receptors depending on age and breed. While cats have 45 to 80 million, the average human has a mere 5 million. So sniffing out the icky candied fruit bread well-meaning relatives send, or the delicious dark chocolate from Belgium hiding under the tree is no hard task for them. What is hard, is the after effects of such a binge, which at times can be fatal.

Without question, for cats the serious dangers involve decorations. Tinsel, ribbons, and string can easily turn from a great time of attacking the shiny object, to a deadly foreign body. According to PVI pet insurance, a foreign body is one of the most common insurance claims for a pet owner. Be it a ribbon that kitty ingested, or a ham bone puppy dug out of the kitchen trash, there are signs to look for if you suspect your pet has ingested a foreign body. Most pets will become lethargic, or listless, they will also stop eating. Or if

they do try to eat, they will vomit whatever they do eat. In some cases they will have diarrhea as well. If the object has not fully blocked the intestines, they may vomit only for a short time. With a complete blockage, the pet may be unable to keep anything down, including liquids. In any case it is highly recommended that you visit your Veterinarian for the first step in diagnosis. We are blessed in Vernonia with two Veterinarian Clinics--Vernonia Vet can be reached at 503-429-1612 Mondays, Wednesdays & Saturdays in Vernonia and after hours at 503-397-6470. Valley Vet, is in Vernonia on Thursdays and can be reached at 503-556-3084, or after hours as well at 503-556-3084.

Another danger lurking for pets is holiday plants, among the varied list of hazardous plants is Pine Needles, Poinsettias, Holly, and Mistletoe to name a few. When eaten these plants may cause anything from stomach upset to hallucinations and even death. Please

refer to the Animal Poison Control Center for more information. They can be reached at [www.petpoisonhelpline.com](http://www.petpoisonhelpline.com), or 1-800-213-6680 (if calling with a medical emergency there is a \$35.00 fee) They do mention on their web site, "The sooner the diagnosis, the easier, less expensive, and safer it is to treat your pet."

We do hope for a safe, happy, healthy holiday for all of Vernonia's residents and beloved pets! You may have noticed in this issue of Vernonia's Voice on page 13, Creatures is offering a 15% off coupon for grooming! The coupon expires on December 24th, so call today for your appointment, as our schedule is filling quickly! We also have a new supply of gift ideas for pets, and pet lovers! See you soon! 503-429-pets(7387).

W-2  
to be filled with em  
Tax  
APRIL  
M T W T F  
PAYROLL PLUS LLC  
1040  
Department of the Treasury  
U.S. Indi...  
Edi Sheldon  
503-429-1819  
edisheldon@gmail.com  
Income Tax Preparation  
(Individual & Small Business)  
Bookkeeping  
QuickBooks Assistance  
Full Service Payroll  
LTC# 29629-C

### Local Properties For Rent



**1305 Grove Street**  
3 bdrm, beautiful wood floors throughout, living room has woodstove, large kitchen, gas heat, fenced yard, garage. \$850/mo.  
Available in early November - please do not disturb current tenants.



**184 Bridge Street**  
Vernonia, 2 bdrm, 1 bath, duplex, completely remodeled kitchen & bath, new carpet & paint, garage, w/d hookups. \$625/month

For more info contact Ted at 503-799-0999  
**VIP Property Management, Inc.**