

## Begin planning for the Christmas holiday

The holidays can often be a very stressful time for families. Single-parent families and blended families often have to deal with complicated schedules, as well as complicated feelings.

Although some parents have holiday details in their legal agreement, others work out plans every year. It is important to be reasonable, flexible and plan ahead.

The following are some practical suggestions for divorced or separated parents to consider.

1. Consider your hopes for this holiday season—the times with the children, the times without the children. Have several versions, all acceptable to you.

2. Present these alternatives to the other parents. (If you don't communicate well, use the mail.) Give the other parent time to think about your proposals and respond.

3. Try to plan your holiday times well ahead. Two months notice is not too much.

4. If you talk in person or by phone, follow up your understanding of the conversation with a brief and informal note of confirmation. When emotionally laden post-divorce holidays tangle with practical matters such as dates, plans, expenses and responsibilities, written confirmation is essential.

5. Be very specific when making plans. Which parent will have the children, which day? For how long?

Who will do the transportation? What about transportation costs, etc.? Remember the holiday season is the perfect time to fan the anger and resentments from the past, to reignite unfinished emotional business.

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## Plants need light in fall too

During fall and winter, indoor plants frequently suffer from lack of light.

By November the sun is tracing a lower angle in the sky and the days are getting shorter. A check of light levels on indoor plants is advisable.

The ideal position for most plants, especially flowering ones, is a large window with a southern exposure. Foliage plants generally need less light than flowering varieties and most of them grow well in all exposures. Window light also can be supplemented with artificial light.

If you are unsure of a plant's light requirements, inquire at a

garden store or nursery.

High indoor temperatures in the fall and winter can also cause plant problems. Houseplants respond best to temperatures from 60 to 74 degrees F. They also need a definite change in temperature, just as occurs in nature. This means a five to ten degree drop at night so that

plants can build up new tissues from the food supply they manufactured during the day.

When the room is too hot, plants tend to become spindly and less resistant to disease and insect attack. They also produce poor quality flowers.

## Protect perennial plants

While preparing the home garden for the winter layover, don't forget to check perennial garden plants. There are several things you can do to help them.

The most common garden perennials are rhubarb, asparagus, horseradish and Jerusalem artichoke. Some care now will keep these perennials in better shape through the winter and ready them for next spring.

Rhubarb plants need only occasional attention. Every three or four years, around late October, drive the blade of a shovel down through the middle of the plant. Then remove half of the plant, crown, roots and all.

Fill the hole with compost, rotted manure, or fertilizer mixed with organic matter to help assure a good crop next spring. The plant half you have dug up can be replanted in another spot.

Asparagus beds can last 20 years with very little care other than keeping grass from invading. But, with a little extra care, you can

enjoy an earlier and bigger harvest.

Mulch the asparagus beds with four to six inches of chopped leaves, weed-free straw, hay, or similar materials. Next spring remove the mulch from half of the bed. The asparagus will come up more quickly where the mulch is removed and the mulched section will emerge later, thus extending your asparagus season.

Remove the mulch soon after spears begin emerging, otherwise they will curl over. Add some nitrogen fertilizer in the spring.

Horseradish is known as the lazy man's perennial because it is so carefree. You need to plant this vegetable where it has room to spread.

Horseradish is best (and most potent) when harvested after several good frosts in the fall. It winters over with just a light mulching in severe weather.

Treat Jerusalem artichokes in the same way as horseradish, with the same watchful eye on the surrounding garden.

## Pellets should burn clean

Q. I recently bought a pellet burning stove. What should I look for in a good quality pellet?

A. There are several things to look for:

Pellets should be clean and dust free.

They should be firm and hard to break.

Better pellets are of uniform size with few small chunks. They are generally about one-quarter inch in diameter and up to one inch long.

They should be relatively free of chemical additives, which some times are used to hold the pellets together.

Pellets should have a potential heat content of at least 8,200 British thermal units (Btu) per pound.

They should have a high bulk density (at least 40 pounds per cubic foot).

You should be able to find most

of this information in the product literature.

Good quality pellets burn with little or no visible smoke or pollution in a properly designed stove. They produce little if any creosote. Their price compares favorably with cord wood when their relative heat outputs are considered.

Pellets are manufactured from sawdust, other wood wastes and sometimes agricultural by-products. The raw materials are dried and ground to the proper size, then fed into a pellet mill where they are squeezed under high pressure into chunks that resemble rabbit feed. They generally are sold in bulk or in 40-pound bags.

Pellets made from agricultural wastes may produce more residue because of their higher silicate content. Your stove may require more frequent cleaning as a result of using them.

## Moisture affects house

Your house can't cough and sneeze. It doesn't suffer from itchy skin or an irritated throat. But in its own way, it suffers as much as you do from too much or too little moisture in the indoor air.

Finding the right humidity balance is the key to a healthy environment for both you and your house.

Humidity problems are a major cause of dissatisfaction with new homes.

If the humidity in the house is healthy for its occupants, chances are it's healthy for the house as well. You can easily monitor the relative humidity with a hygrometer. They're available in all price ranges, from \$5 up.

What is the right balance? Keeping the relative humidity between 40 and 60 percent. People whose homes are drier than 40 percent have more respiratory infections because their nasal passages dry out. But when the humidity level rises higher than 60 percent, people with allergies have problems with molds, fungi and dust mites that flourish in high humidity.

The house itself reacts to overly dry air with static electricity. But if the air is too moist, water condenses on windows in the winter. These drippy windows can rot window sills and stain window coverings.

Corrective actions exist for both situations.

For relative humidity above 60

percent, you need to find and reduce moisture sources in the house. Moisture comes from people, pets and plants. Bathing, showering, cooking, watering plants, and washing and drying clothes all add moisture to the air. So does breathing (yes, even plants breathe). Moisture also seeps into the house from the ground underneath.

It's unlikely that you can eliminate any of these sources, so your best bet is to get rid of some of the moisture they produce by using ventilating fans in the kitchen and bathrooms and by covering the crawl space with a ground cover.

If, on the other hand, the hygrometer shows the relative humidity to be below 40 percent, you need to add moisture to the air.

A humidifier will do this. Just be sure you don't turn it so high that it pushes the relative humidity above the 60 percent mark.

Above 60 percent relative humidity, moisture in the air might be considered a pollutant. Not only does high relative humidity boost molds, fungi, and dust mites, but it also seems to increase chemical interactions among indoor air contaminants.

It all comes down to finding the right balance. That means high enough relative humidity to clear up your itchy skin and nagging respiratory ailments, but not so high that moisture condenses on the windows and drips onto the sills.

## Keep tabs on money

Make 1990 the year to start keeping a closer tab on where your money goes and to organize your records and business papers.

Extension offers these record-keeping ideas to make the job easier.

First, choose one place to keep your records. This could be as elaborate as a home office or as simple as a drawer in the kitchen. The important thing is to find a place where all your family financial papers can be stored.

Second, decide who will take major responsibility for family records. Of course, all family members need to know how the filing system works and how to

find information easily. Also, some tasks may be shared or delegated. But one person with the skills and interest in the job should take leadership.

Third, develop a regular schedule for bookkeeping and resolve to stick to it. A routine will reduce the time you spend on record keeping. Set up a regular time each month to balance the checkbook, fill in the family income and expense records, and pay the bills.

For more information on setting up a family record-keeping system, ask for Extension's publication, "Organizing Your Family Records," EC 1302.

## Safety urged during winter outdoor activities

While some people spend the winter months indoors avoiding cold and snow, other people seek winter as the time to be outdoors, for activities like skiing, skating and sledding. The benefits of winter sports include good exercise, fresh air, winter scenery and of course, fun.

But winter sports have their own hazards along with the benefits. The National Safety Council offers these tips for protecting yourself as you enjoy winter sports:

**Dressing for the cold—**

Dress in layers. Layers of thick, loose clothing insulate the body by trapping warm, dry air. Also, dressing in layers allows you to remove one or more if you warm up. This is an important consideration since clothing damp from sweat loses its insulating ability and can result in hypothermia, a dangerous cooling of your body.

To help absorb and evaporate sweat, wear loose, thin cotton underwear for your first layer, and two-piece thermal underwear for your second.

For your torso, wear a cotton shirt under a wool shirt or sweater, and as many size-graduated wool shirts and sweaters as the cold dictates. For your legs, wear wool or thermal trousers, either quilted or specially lined.

As a final body layer, wear a windproof and waterproof outer garment. It should fit loosely on the body and snugly at the waist and neck.

The feet, hands and head require special protection. Since hands and feet are farthest from the heart, they become cooled most easily. This factor plus exposure can result in frostbite. And, if you don't wear a hat or hood, up to 40 percent of body heat can be lost through your head.

For feet, wear light cotton socks next to the skin and heavy wool socks over them. Waterproof boots are essential. Wool mittens keep hands warmer than gloves. You might want to wear gloves under mittens for extra warmth. And be sure you wear a hat or hood and scarf to protect your face and neck.

**Skiing—** Make sure equipment is up-to-date and well-maintained. Boots should be snug but not tight. Be especially sure that bindings release properly—they are your most important safety feature.

When you hit the slopes, follow the National Ski Patrol System's Skier's Responsibility Code:

1. Ski under control. Don't go so fast you can't stop or turn to avoid other skiers or obstacles in the trail.

2. Look out for skiers below you when skiing downhill or passing another skier.

3. Don't stop where you block a trail or where skiers can't see you from above.

4. Yield to other skiers when entering a trail or starting downhill.

5. Always use safety straps or ski brakes to prevent runaway skis.

6. Keep off trails or slopes that are closed.

In addition to the code, remember the right way to fall: on your bottom with legs extended in front. Bracing a fall with an arm or knee can cause injury. Learn how to get up from a fall by tucking knees under, placing skis across the slope and pushing up with your poles.

**Skating—**

Be extremely careful in choosing an ice skating surface. A shallow pond, rink, or specially flooded field or parking lot (closed to cars) is best. Ice should look clear or blue. Look for ice that has been designated safe for skating. Ice over deeper water should be at least four inches thick. Ice over either the center of a deep lake or running water may be dangerously weak. Also avoid ice that has melted and refrozen, which looks granular and cloudy. On sunny days, watch for cracks, puddles or dark patches—these are signs of weak ice or melting.

Be sure that skates fit well. Don't let children use slightly large skates in hope that they'll "grow into them." Kids need the fall and sprain protection of well-fitted skates now.

If you're skating in a group, don't bunch up on the ice. Leave room for falls around yourself and others. Beginning and advanced skaters should take care to avoid each other.

Learn how to turn and stop well. These skills are essential for preventing collisions and falls. If you do find yourself falling, try to relax your body, roll into the fall, and distribute the impact throughout your body. Landing on knees or sharply braced arms can result in an injury.

If ice breaks and you fall through, don't panic. And don't try to climb out—you'll just break more ice and fall back in. Instead, spread your arms over the ice, get a grip and kick your legs. This will propel you onto the ice. Don't stand up immediately—you might break through again. Just roll along the ice until you are well away from open water.

If somebody else falls through, don't walk out after the person. Lie flat and extend a pole, rope, branch or your arm. Several people can lie flat and make a chain by grabbing the ankles of the person in front. Pull the victim out of the water and roll safely away from the break.

Once the person is out, call emergency personnel and get him to shelter. Remove wet clothes and wrap the body in warm blankets. Give warm, non-caffeinated, non-alcoholic liquids. If the victim is unconscious, give rescue breathing (and CPR, if warranted) if you are qualified to do so.

**Sledding—** Sleds should be well-constructed and in good condition. Runners should curve continuously and connect with the rail in front. Be sure the steering mechanism works well. On wooden sleds, sand down rough edges.

Sled during the day on hills free of trees, rocks, bare spots and other obstacles. The bottom of a hill should be wide and flat, for smooth stops, and away from streets and bodies of water. Never sled on a street, toboggan run or ski slope. Children should only sled under adult supervision.

Different sleds require different positions. Lie on your stomach on traditional sleds with runners. Sit on discs and plastic sheets. Never ride standing up, and don't pile on. If you cannot avoid a crash, cover your face and head with your arms and roll off your sled. Be sure to avoid sledders when retrieving your sled.

Take care of sleds. Don't leave them outside overnight, and dry them before storing them. Continued exposure to cold and damp can weaken and damage a sled. When winter is over, wax wooden parts and lubricate the mechanism before storing the sled for the summer.

## Planning for holidays can combat loneliness

Christmas is promoted as the most wonderful time of the year, filled with family gatherings, feasting and celebration, and loving and giving. But for some people, the holiday season can be a very lonely time.

The "holiday blues" can hit anyone, especially those who become depressed when their own lives do not match the idea of the holidays. People who live alone are particularly vulnerable.

The happiness of the holiday season may have evaporated for older people who have outlived relatives and friends, are estranged from their families, or are unable to be with family. In such situations the emphasis on "family togetherness" may only deepen feelings of loneliness.

Some older people who do spend holidays with relatives experience a "let-down" afterwards when they are alone again and life's routine returns.

Holiday loneliness can strike even persons surrounded by family and friends. People don't have to be alone to feel lonely.

Being housebound or suffering from loss of vision, hearing or ambulation can increase feelings of loneliness. When people don't feel connected to others or if they lack needed emotional relationships they tend to experience loneliness.

The lack of an intimate or close relationship is often felt more acutely during the holidays. A woman caring for a husband afflicted with Alzheimer's disease stated, "At Christmas, the changes

in Ted always seem magnified, partly because of how things used to be. Although he is here with me, he's not the person he used to be and our relationship is no longer husband and wife. It's more like mother and son, or nursemaid and patient."

The holidays can be especially difficult for the bereaved, particularly the first Christmas following a divorce or death of a spouse. All around are messages saying we "should" be happy, "should" be having a good time. The contrast between these "shoulds" and the actual feelings of the bereaved can intensify the pain of loss and loneliness.

We also tend to approach the holiday with great expectations. Disappointment may result when holiday joy is less than what we hoped it would be—the call that was not received from a daughter; the family conflict that erupted; the spouse who drank too much; or the children and grandchildren who did not visit.

While individual reactions to loneliness vary greatly, for some people the feeling simply does not pass. Intense or prolonged feelings of loneliness can develop into serious depression or the worsening of an existing medical condition. Loneliness also can bring on self-destructive behavior such as excessive drinking, failure to take needed medications, or even suicide.

Allowing honest expression of

emotions is important. The availability of a family member or friend willing to listen is a great help to persons coping with loss, or memories of happier times that heighten present feelings of loneliness.

People need to talk about their losses and feelings, and they need to be understood. It doesn't help to tell someone to "cheer up," that the loss was so long ago it should be forgotten, or that "the holidays are for happiness, not sadness."

Planning ahead is one way to combat loneliness and depression. For older adults who will be alone during the holidays, a "family" may be created by getting together with others who are in similar situations.

One 84-year-old man without family ties said, "Too many people talk only about past Christmases when they could be making the current season memorable and enjoyable." Each day during the holiday season he does something which is personally rewarding. At Christmas he is "grandpa" to several neighborhood children. Many who are alone often find fulfillment in helping others.

Changing the scene and creating a holiday celebration in a new setting—the beach or the mountains—can be an effective antidote to the holiday blues.

One 70-year-old woman's remedy for loneliness is to keep the pets of her neighbors and friends who leave

## 4-H awards presented

"The Circle Continues" was the theme for the 4-H Awards Program held at the 4-H Center November 12. Pastor Rick Ribeiro opened with a prayer and was followed by pledges, led by Jacqueline Langley, a 4-H member.

Awards were presented to the members of the Beadwork, Embroidery, Grooming, Net Making, Rabbit, Search and Rescue and Shawlmaking clubs.

Special awards were presented to Keith Baker, leader of the SAR Club and to Dan and Joann Brisbois for their tremendous support and volunteer work. A special thank you goes to Clint Jacks, Clay Penhollow, Sal Sahme and Judith Charley for their participation with the awards program. Much time and energy went into this event by all Extension staff members.