

Sharing Time

After-divorce advice helps make family holidays work.



The first holiday season after a divorce can place tremendous emotional strain on the best of us. While divorce tends to be very disruptive to families in general, it can be especially heightened around the major Jewish holidays.

As one of the most religious and family-oriented times of the year, families have time-honored traditions they want to uphold for their children, even during the divorce transition.

Rest assured, your holidays can still be a season of joy, but it will require good planning, a positive attitude and, most importantly, realistic expectations.

“While there are changes that will happen in the divorce process, both parents should do their best to honor the traditions and values the family has established prior to the divorce,” said Nancy K. Stone, matrimonial and family lawyer at Rotter & Stone in Franklin.

Partnering with her aunt, matrimonial lawyer Harriet Rotter, Stone recommends strategies that can be put into place to help alleviate some of the holiday stress during divorce.

“When negotiating your parenting time plan, make sure to bring a list of the major Jewish holidays with you that your family has traditionally celebrated so these can be specifically set forth and addressed in the Judgment of Divorce,” Stone said. “The more specific you can be in your divorce judgment, the less negotiating and angst for the children from year to year as they will know well in advance where and how they will be celebrating.

“Also, if one of the parents is more religious than the other, try to make

that part of the consideration when dividing the holidays. Perhaps it is more important to one parent to have more time over the secular holidays versus the religious holidays.”

And consider what aspect of the holidays are most important to your children.

“After careful analysis of these issues, you can be specific about how the major holidays will be divided, depending on your family’s level of observance and your past customs,” Stone

said. “For example, the children can be with one parent for all of Rosh Hashanah and the other parent for Yom Kippur, and this would alternate from year to year. The goal is to keep consistency for your children, and make them feel comfortable and happy celebrating with each parent, while upholding the family traditions.”

Another word of advice is to “expect the unexpected.” What happens when one parent wants to distance themselves from how the family had traditionally been celebrating the holidays? Or what if one parent is leaving the faith altogether?

“These are very important topics to not only discuss with your attorney, but also with your clergy and a therapist to find the right solution for your family,” Stone said.

“The most important thing is to be patient with yourself, your kids and the rest of your family as you celebrate the holidays. This is all new and different for everyone, and a little patience will go a long way toward making your first holidays post-separation/divorce more enjoyable than you might believe they can be right now,” Stone said. 🍎



Nancy Stone