

Basic information:

Make a list of all holidays and other occasions important to your family, including extended school breaks and holidays you celebrate because of your faith, cultural heritage, or family traditions. Then consider the following possible schedules:

- alternate on an odd-year and even-year basis
- split extended holidays in half
- celebrate certain holidays twice
- assign the same holidays to the same parent every year, or
- decide how your children will spend the holidays as each holiday approaches.

Negotiation tip: If you find that you and the other parent cannot reach an agreement on this issue right away, consider creating a plan for “Parent A” and “Parent B”. When you are finished, you can come back to this and decide which of you will be Parent A, and which will be Parent B.

Things to think about:

Holiday planning can become easier if you step back and think creatively. Some of the strategies parents consider for sharing the holidays in ways that everyone finds enjoyable include:

- **Alternating on an odd/even year basis:** This option assigns certain holidays to each parent in odd years and then reverses the schedule in even years. For example, your children might spend Thanksgiving with you in 2014, and with their other parent in 2015. This plan is comforting because parents know they will never miss spending a holiday with their children more than one year in a row. By contrast, this schedule can be frustrating if a particular holiday is meaningful for only one parent.
- **Divide holiday celebrations in half.** Some parents divide the actual holiday celebration (and associated vacation days) in half so that their children can spend part of the time with each parent. This option allows everyone to see each other on the big day but requires advance planning so that your children do not miss the main part of the celebration because of travel. Often parents use the odd-year/even-year plan to alternate who spends the first and second halves of the holiday with their children.
- **Celebrate important holidays twice.** Some families celebrate holidays twice. For example, one parent might celebrate Christmas with the children a week before the actual date, while the other celebrates it with the children on December 25. This is certainly easier when one parent’s family already celebrates a holiday one week before or one week after the actual date so that they can also fit in a “family reunion.” Fortunately, few children complain about getting to celebrate twice!

- Create a holiday schedule that never changes. If you and the other parent differ on which holidays are special, you can assign holiday time so that each of you celebrates the same holidays every year with your children. This option is ideal when, for example, one parent participates in religious celebrations and the other parent chooses nonreligious holiday times for vacations, trips, or other activities.
- Make decisions as each holiday approaches. Some parents prefer not to be tied down to a holiday schedule. As long as you are communicating effectively and your ideas about a holiday schedule are similar, this plan works well. It means, however, that you must spend time arranging every holiday. If you choose this option, decide how far in advance of each holiday you will make your plans.

Solution Ideas:

____ Holidays.

____ This agreement covers the following holidays:

____ Holiday visits will begin at _____[time] and will end at _____ [time].

____ We will adopt an odd year/even year plan, as follows:

____ In odd years, our children will be with _____[parent] for these holidays:

and with _____[parent] for these holidays:

In even years, the reverse will be true.

____ The children will spend one-half of each holiday with each parent as follows:

____ We will both independently celebrate the following holidays with our children:

____ Each parent will celebrate as follows:

____ We will divide holiday vacation periods as follows:

_____ Our children will always spend the following holidays with _____ [parent]:

and will always spend the following holidays with _____ [other parent]:

_____ We will plan for holidays as they come up. We will decide where the children will spend their holidays at least _____ [specify time, such as two weeks or one month] in advance.

_____ We further agree that [specify]: