

# Divorce and the Holidays: No Easy Recipe. Q&A With Family Law Chairs Carlos Lastra and Tracey Coates

By Tracey Coates, Carlos Lastra

## ***What are the best ways for managing divorce during the holidays?***

**Lastra:** The holidays are stressful enough, and even more so, when you throw a divorce into the mix. I always advise my clients to do these five things: anticipate, plan, communicate, adjust, and repeat. You want to head potential problems off at the pass, and the sooner the better. The unknown is a great source of stress. I encourage people to take the higher road - in writing - if they can. If you are in the midst of divorce proceedings, you are not only building good will, but good evidence.

**Coates:** There are many questions to consider. If there are children, how are you going to be sharing them? My advice is to put the kids first. That's not only good for your family, but it is good for your case. If there are family traditions, which will you preserve? When it comes to money, what do you need, what might you be paying? Can you set up a special account for gifts, visiting family, vacations, and travel? The earlier you do this, the better you can plan, and the easier it is on you and your family.

## ***What are your tips for blended families and divorced parents during the holidays?***

**Lastra:** You want to deal with upcoming plans well in advance and document them by using technology. Today there are many tools like Family Wizard and shared Google calendars. Most important, do not put the kids in the middle. Comments like, "You tell your father . . ." put children between their parents and sometimes it backfires. It's all about the long game, and many more holidays and family occasions.

**Coates:** Families of celebrities, public figures, politicians, athletes are just like us. Though how they handle the holidays can spill over into social media and affect their reputations. If they act rudely to their ex-spouse, that can create bad will in the public. They can do many positive things that will help their image, such as starting new traditions and engaging in charitable events with their children or with their blended families.

## ***What if you are facing your first Christmas alone after separation or divorce?***

**Lastra:** This is a time for family, and, I suggest that you should use it if it's available, but try to establish clear parameters on what is going to work for you. Consider breaking the mold. Consider trying something new. If you always used to go somewhere to ski, think about going somewhere tropical. You want to start new traditions for yourself and take time for yourself too.

**Coates:** You are dealing with what may have been a happy time and now you don't have those same traditions. You may be feeling anxious, sad, or depressed, and it is important to do things for yourself, like going on outings, socializing, and seeking a professional outlet, such as your own therapist.

## ***What advice do you have for seeing your ex at Christmas?***

**Lastra:** As I mentioned earlier, prepare for it. Discuss the venue, where you'll be seeing each other. Inform others who are going to be there. Understand who is coming or not coming. Know if he or she is bringing a date. That's something you don't want to be surprised about.

**Coates:** You don't want to have heated arguments in front of your children, relatives or friends. If you are feeling frustrated or angry, try to excuse yourself. Remember the support you have. You can ask a family member to assist you. If you have children, try to look at your former spouse as your child's parent. When you are writing about your holidays and your former spouse, on social media for example, remember that

a judge will be reading what you write.

***What are some tips for sharing custody during the holidays?***

**Lastra:** You want to decide what you want your arrangement to look like and write it down. Be clear about your intentions so that if you have children, they don't make assumptions that you may be getting back together with your spouse. You may want to consider splitting the holidays. Overall, try to create as much predictability as you can, especially for children.

**Coates:** This is an area that can be very challenging, where issues such as customs, approaches to gift giving, traditions and even religion that were shared, are now separate. Try to avoid having arguments about this with your ex-spouse in front of the kids. You can't ignore the impact that this has on kids.



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