

**The following is from a handout from Bananas Child Care Information and Referral in Oakland, CA:**

The joyous holiday season is here. But, will it be as joyous as we expect? Giving. . . receiving. . . baking. . . creating. Memories of childhood happiness. But, was it as joyous as we'd like to remember?

Now is a good time to think seriously about the coming holiday season. It is a good time to plan how you want the days to be for you and for your children as well as for your other family and friends. Time taken now to sort out your own feelings and expectations may help secure you the joys you'll want to remember.

First, find some quiet time to think about past holidays. Were they happy or sad occasions? Were there special people who made the holiday happy (or sad) who have died or gone away? Will you miss them very much this year? When you were a child, was your family together at holiday time or were there family troubles which became more intense during this season? Come to terms with your own past experiences. Admit to yourself, openly, that certain people won't be with you this time, that you have new and different family ties. Knowing what helped make past holidays happy or sad for you will help you create expectations for the season which might reasonably come true.

Secondly, look around at all the commercial and public versions of the holidays. Don't be sold expectations that aren't yours. Try to set up your goals. There are many ways to celebrate without bowing to cultural pressures.

Here are some specific suggestions:

1. When pressures from your family and friends begin, ask yourself what you really want to do for the celebration. Ask the children (no matter how young) what they want and incorporate some of their ideas into your plans. You'll have better success if you include everyone in the planning rather than try to pre-package the event yourself. There is no reason for one adult to plan and execute the entire day. Help the children assume responsibility for gift making and wrapping, decorations, etc. Ask everyone what was the best part of last year's day and try to include it again. Be sure to ask what was the worst part as well- - eliminate that! Make your holiday mean more- - - plan a special "event" for a day (a picnic, trip, dinner). With everyone in the family involved in the planning there will be less expectation and anticipation centered on one day and more chance for success.
2. What to do if your family is separated or divorced this year and the children's time must be divided? You, as a parent, should try to come to an agreement before the holiday pressures build up. Tell the children very clearly where they will be and who will be with them. Even if this information is painful to you, the children must hear it often. . . ahead of time, at the time, and after the time. A comment like "*You are going to miss daddy?*", "*You seem to miss mommy?*", "*This year is certainly different from last*", "*Our family isn't together like we were*" is good. Simple statements, spoken calmly and without bitterness (if possible, practice if this will be difficult) will help your children know that you can understand their feelings, and that if they want to talk to you about those feelings, you will listen. Invite guests to your house. It doesn't really matter if there aren't enough dishes or chairs. Don't wait for other people to ask you. If you're now a single parent, your house is a home and your children would enjoy sharing the holidays in their own surrounding.
3. Giving can be educational, joyful, and meaningful. Think of alternative gifts- - - they don't have to be toys or candy; a special gesture is a gift (use words and affection to tell your

children what they mean to you and what holidays mean). Tell stories about your experiences as a child during the holiday. Homemade gifts are nice but many of us do work, so remember that gift-giving is just one part of the holidays. Children should be encouraged to make gifts and cards for whomever they want. No matter how lumpy or imperfect, anything a child has actually made is more meaningful than a gift which has been 99% put together by an adult.

4. Holiday time is a time when children (and adults!) can be very sensitive. Too many sweets, too much excitement can make children cranky and extra tired. . . feelings can be easily hurt. Have an extra large and nutritious breakfast at least on the big day(s). Protect yourself and your children in more ways than one with nutritious meals.