

Reasons Why Children Get Angry during the Holidays



This article explains ways children may express their anger over the holidays and how you can help.

by Linda Ranson Jacobs

Some single parents face the holidays with excitement and a resolve to make this holiday season the best ever for their children. However, if this is the first year you have faced the holidays as a single parent, then you may be approaching the holidays with trepidation. You are not sure how your children are going to react to the coming holidays.

This article explains a few ways that children may express their anger during the holidays. Also included are tips on what you can do to help children deal with anger, how you can reduce a child's frustrations during the holidays and what you can teach your children about situations they get angry about.

How Children May Express Anger during the Holidays

For the child of divorce, many times the holidays bring up feelings of tremendous anger. Thoughts like, "If my dad hadn't been so selfish, he wouldn't have gotten a divorce. He wasn't even thinking about me. He was only thinking about what he wanted. What about me? I want him here for Christmas. I'm GLAD he's going to be alone on Christmas Day. He doesn't deserve to have a merry Christmas."

Many times, shortly after the angry "I'm glad he is alone" thoughts, come the conflicting thoughts: "I'm glad we get to go to Dad's for

Thanksgiving dinner. But what about Mom—will she be alone that day? Will she miss me at dinner? We always play that game with the turkey and dressing, seeing who can eat the most. Whom will she talk to if I'm at Dad's house?" Also, children may long for acceptance from both parents. Because of this, they may vacillate back and forth with their feelings of anger, resentment and guilt for wanting to enjoy the holidays with both parents.

Here's one of the key reasons children can get so angry during the holidays: Everything has changed. Life has changed. The family unit has changed. And even though Thanksgiving and Christmas still come around, the celebrations will be different. As holiday routines are interrupted, the loss of security may become overwhelming to some children. Why? Routines bring a sense of security in knowing what's expected of each person. When routines are interrupted, children become angry and unsure of what is happening. They don't know what is expected of them or how they are supposed to act. Some children will have full-blown angry outbursts while others will remain crabby and out of sorts for days.

How You Can Help a Child Deal with Anger

As a parent or friend of the family, there are several things you can do to help smooth the holidays for children of divorce. Here are a few ideas:

Encourage reminiscing

It's okay to reminisce about past holidays. Let the children know it's okay to talk about these things. Pull out the pictures from past holidays. Pore over them and talk about what fun everyone had. If your child gets angry when remembering past holidays, then talk about what you can do as a single parent family to make things different this year.

Allow children to help plan holiday celebrations

Ask the children what they think would be a good plan to help them get through these times. Ask the children what traditions from the past they want to keep. Don't make them wonder about how they'll spend the holidays. Keep the lines of communication open.

Keep your routines

Do your best to keep routines the same so children can depend on some things staying the same. If you do have to interrupt the normal routine, make sure your children know in advance what is taking place.

Do something new

Even though children thrive with routines, change—when introduced and handled well—can be good too. This is especially true if a past tradition is too painful to continue. For example, maybe your family has always gone to pick out a tree together. But doing it without Dad may seem overwhelming to your child. Talk about still doing this, but with a variation. Possibly you could go with another family or plan on going with just one parent.

Revisit the Christmas story

This activity helps children see that they're not alone in their anger. It also reminds them of the reason we celebrate Christmas. Read and discuss the Christmas story from the Bible. Let them imagine what it must have been like for Mary and Joseph to find out that

all of the places to sleep in Bethlehem were taken. Ask your children if perhaps Mary or Joseph might have experienced a little anger. Gradually bring the conversation around to some of the new ideas and things you will do this year. Make a plan to create at least one new tradition this year. Maybe it's to read the Christmas story out of the Bible while sitting in front of the tree sipping hot chocolate. If your children won't be with you on Christmas Day, then do it a couple of days after Christmas.

Teaching Your Children about Frustrating Situations

As you heal and your children mature, bring up the concept that God can bring good out of every situation. Sometimes things might not make sense, but we need to teach our children that even in those times, God is still in control of our lives. Show your children through your actions that everyone gets angry, but it's how we handle our anger that's important. And in those times when things get stressful during the holidays, and when you fail as a parent and in your example for your children, then stop and, in front of your children, ask God to forgive you.

Don't get down on yourself if you struggle with anger. And don't feel like you're a bad parent if you end up repeatedly asking God to forgive you. Remember, if you're a Christian, God accepts you because of what Christ has done for you. God's acceptance of you has NEVER been based upon your day-to-day behavior. So go to God confidently, asking for help, knowing that He accepts you and that He is eager to give you forgiveness, mercy and the help you need. Your children will learn a great deal about God's character if you approach God in that manner. Far more than if you were to pretend that you didn't have a problem with anger.

Be prepared, because with the excitement and merriment all around your kids at Christmas, you can count on them getting a little angry. And yes they will probably experience anger several times. Children have a right to be angry at the situation this year; however, this anger should not be an excuse for angry tirades or angry behavior that affects others. You may also experience anger over and over again this year. Prepare for it and then deal with it. Think ahead and you may be able to diffuse various situations. Stay close the Word and keep forefront in your mind what Thanksgiving and Christmas are really all about.

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