

## Legal Matters: Schedule kids' time with each parent early to take the stress out of the holidays

Dec 07, 2015

**Q:** It is barely December, and I am overwhelmed with everything I have to do. How can I cut the crazy out of Christmas?

**A:** As lawyers specializing in family law, we find that holidays in general, and in particular the Christmas season, are particularly stressful times of the year, with their high expectations for happiness, coupled with long periods of time with family. While we do what we can to assist clients with an exit strategy and preparedness if things go bad suddenly, there are a number of suggestions we offer that do not require the specialized services of a family lawyer, and which you can do all by yourself.

On a common-sense basis, pruning the to-do list is always a good idea. Ask yourself the question "If I don't do this, what will happen?" Just because your mother made 10 different kinds of homemade cookies, doesn't mean that one or two kinds of homemade goodies will not be appreciated. If you are really out of time, buy, do not bake, or delegate — maybe this is something that the older children will enjoy doing. This "less is more" philosophy applies to decorating and cleaning. The sort of guest that runs around checking for dust on top of your picture frames deserves dusty fingers. People take a close look at kitchens, bathrooms, and wherever they are being entertained. The rest of the house, not so much! I recommend that you have a list of the important things to remember, and save the list year after year. Why reinvent the wheel? It is fun to read the reminders: "Don't forget cousin Jenny is allergic to carrots."

One of the most important things you can do if you and your spouse are separated is to make sure that you have agreement in writing on the Christmas access with the children during the holiday period. While there are as many different solutions as there are different families, it is important to remember that a happy holiday begins and ends with everyone including the children (if they are old enough) knowing what the schedule will be ahead of time.

Your friends at Shank Law.