

6 tips for successful co-parenting during school holidays

Date: Sunday July 9, 2023

After separationordivorce, parents will often live in separate households. Separated parents don't have to be friends, but they do have to make suitable arrangements for co-parenting any children of the relationship. This can often pose challenges around special occasions, like school holidays, festive holiday periods, Mother's/Father's Day and children's birthdays.

In this blog, we explore our top 6 co-parenting tips for separated families to get through school holidays as seamlessly and stress-free aspossible.

School holidays can cause co-parenting challenges for separated parents

School holidays and other special occasions in a child's life are a much anticipated and exciting time for children. School holidays, in particular, present a unique opportunity for children to develop new skills and interests, explore their imagination, and connect with their families.

However, school holidays can present challenges for many parents trying to balance their own commitments with their desire to spend quality time with their children. As school holidays often require a change in routine for both parents and children, tension and conflict between the parents may arise. For separated or divorced parents in particular, the question of how to divide their time spent with the children can be even more challenging.

What does the law say about school holidays?

TheFamily Law Act 1975(Cth) ("the Act") outlines the rights and responsibilities of parents, promotes the best interests of their children, and protects the notion of the family. A central issue the Act deals with is the importance of children having meaningful

relationships with both of theirparents.

However, the Act does not specifically address how school holiday time or other special occasions are to be managed. This leaves parents with the task of making arrangements that align with their often-competing commitments and desires, and the needs of the children.

For example, some parents may have to take leave over the Christmas period and want to spend that time with their children as it is more convenient. Others may want to spend an entire two-week block of school holidays with their children for a family trip abroad.

We encourage parents to negotiate school holiday arrangements that account for the usual routines of the children, the distance between the parent's homes, the children's ages and wishes, and any work or personal commitments of both parents.

Our 6 top tips to help co-parent during school holidays

Plan ahead

Turn your mind to making your school holiday plans early – the sooner, the better.

Give yourself and the other parent the time to make enquires with your respective employers about annual leave, and to organise alternative care arrangements for your children in the event both parents are occupied with work or other fixed commitments.

Consider special occasions (eg, birthdays) or public holidays that fall during the school holiday periods, as well as extra-curricular activities your children may be involved in. These considerations can all be addressed in advance of school holidays, alleviating some of the stress and pressure you may experience as the holidays approach.

Stay child-focused

While it can be challenging enough trying to balance your work commitments, the children's extra-curricular activities, and various special occasions over the school holidays periods, it is most important to focus on what you can do to create the best outcome for your children.

You should largely think about what the children's routines usually are and what the impact of any significant disruption to that routine might have on the children.

Other factors to contemplate are the practical difficulty and expense of facilitating the care arrangements for the children, the capacity of both parents in meeting your children's various needs, and any views expressed by your children (depending on their age). The best interests of your children must be at the heart of any arrangements you make for their care.

Offer flexibility

Despite your best efforts to plan ahead and stay child-focused, there may be hiccups along the way. Life is often unpredictable, and plans might change last minute. These changes may not be in your control, and you will have to adapt to whatever situation presents itself. Treat this as an opportunity for you to role model and teach your children important life skills in adapting to change.

In the event you or the other parent need to make changes to the school holiday arrangements for your children, pause and think about what implications this change is going to have for everyone involved. If you can address these concerns, it may offset any frustration, upset or burden experienced by yourself and/or the other parent.

Despite this, some requests to change arrangements may not be quite so reasonable and could result in significant disruption for yourself and your children. In these circumstances, it is important to establish clear boundaries.

Establish boundaries

Putting clear boundaries in place with the other parent will maintain a balance between autonomy and compromise. It will provide you both with a mutual understanding of the levels of support, involvement, and flexibility required in the family unit while setting the expectations and responsibilities for both parents.

Naturally, people will parent their children differently at times. But it is important to have established a clear threshold for when your expectations are not being met, or when the other parent makes a request that goes beyond the scope of what you canaccommodate.

Communicate effectively

Effective communication is paramount when negotiating any parenting arrangements or setting a boundary. The same can be said for discussing arrangements for school holiday time with the other parent.

Remain calm, clear, and purposeful when discussing care arrangements. As mentioned, keep the dialogue child-focused and flexible.

Before entering into any discussions, consider whether the communication should be facilitated in person or via text message or email. You should also give thought to when an appropriate time would be to communicate with the other parent, what information they will need from you, what effect the arrangements will have on them as well as the children, and what you can do to support them.

If you maintain your patience and a respectful tone when communicating with the other parent, you are far more likely to get the outcome you areseeking.

Embrace child-free time

School holidays follow generally busy school terms that are consumed by homework, sports, lessons, and birthday parties. Of course, you will miss your children when they are not in your care – they are typically at the centre of your day-to-day life.

But you can approach the school holiday times when your children are not with you as a well-deserved break. The holidays can be an opportune time for self-care, or for focusing on other relationships with partners, family, and friends. Embrace this opportunity!

Getting help from a family lawyer

If you are unable to negotiate or reach agreement in relation to school holidays or other special occasions arrangements that best fit your specific circumstances and your children's needs, it may be useful to seek advice and assistance from a family lawyer.

At Meillon & Bright, we are able to assist you in negotiating robust and practical arrangements for your family during school holiday time, as well as other parenting arrangements more generally.

Our experienced team of lawyers can also assist in drafting a parenting plan or obtaining parenting orders for you and your children to provide stability and continuity during what should be a fun and exciting time.

The information contained in this article is of general nature and should not be construed as legal advice. If you require further information, advice or assistance for your specific circumstances, please contact us.