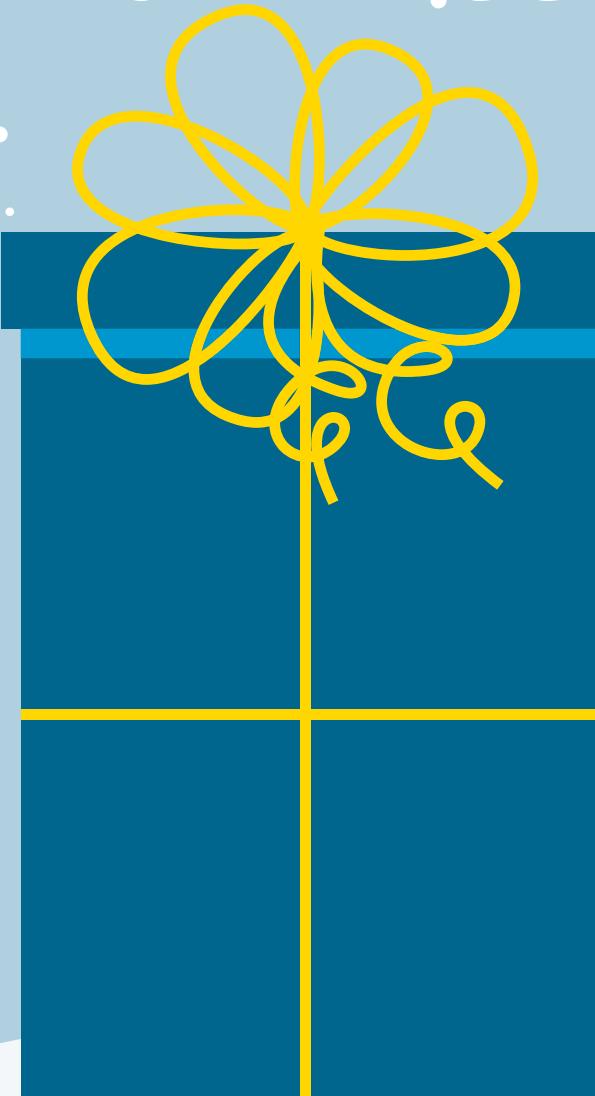
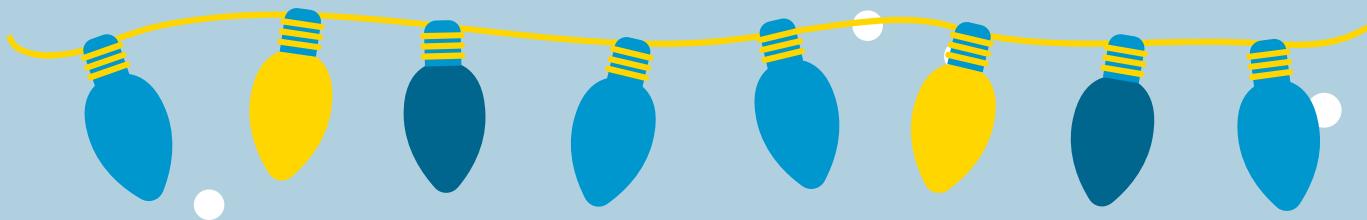


# A Christmas Survival Guide For Separated Families



[www.nfm.org.uk](http://www.nfm.org.uk)



## 1. Plan ahead

There is always lots happening in the run-up to Christmas, as well as over the Christmas holiday. It can be tempting to put off having those difficult conversations with your ex-partner, but the earlier you start planning then the easier it will be:

-  It will cause you less stress
-  It will give you time to sort out the things you struggle to agree on
-  Will allow you the chance to look forward to the times you will spend with your children

We've put together a [Christmas Parenting Schedule](#) to help you sort out, with your ex-partner, what Christmas will look like this year. On this schedule you can plot out key details such as, when you will each see your children, any key school activity dates that need to be agreed, who you would like them to visit over the festive period, what each of you and your extended families are buying them for Christmas, to avoid duplicates.

But if you need extra help, then you can book an appointment to talk with one of our mediators.

[Click here for more information on how our mediators can help you.](#)



## 2. Focus on your children

We all know that Christmas is a magical time for children. However, when you separate, they might feel sad about some of the things you used to do together as a family, but there are some steps that can make it easier for them:

-  Make sure they know what is happening; where will they be and who they will see
-  Think about the special people they will want to spend time with, on both sides of the family and try to build in time to visit them.
-  Don't try to outdo each other on presents and activities – consult with each other on what you are buying, and why not consider buying them a joint present.
-  Try to keep your children out of arguments about arrangements, as they will pick up on the conflict
-  Try to focus on the positives – the fun you will have together, the new memories and traditions you will make - not the things that you did before.
-  But reassure your children that its OK to feel sad about some of the things you used to do together as a family

### 3. Talking to your ex

This can feel like the hardest thing, especially if you aren't communicating with each other very well, but remember this is about making it right for the children. You owe it to them to build a new family life now you have separated, one that will allow the children the space to continue their relationships with both of you.

It may feel like an insurmountable challenge to imagine yourself sitting in the same space but as this parental relationship is going to continue in a new form try to work towards a more business approach to your parenting.

Agree to meet in a place you both feel comfortable, it could be neutral, a café or the park.

Do it without the children present so they aren't affected if it is tense, but do let the children know you are both making arrangements. That way they will know you are both working together for them even if it doesn't feel that way for you.

If you can, sit down together and work through the [Christmas Parenting Schedule](#) sections and deal with them one by one. Start with the things you are already in agreement about, that way you will know there is already some progress when it comes to sorting out the more difficult issues.

### 4. Be kind to yourself

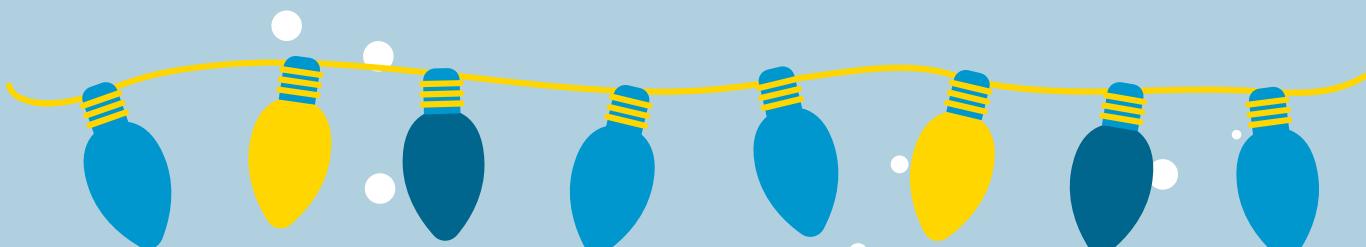
Christmas can be stressful for every parent but is by far one of the toughest times for separated parents. This may be the first year you are having to do it all by yourself, or you may be worrying that you won't be seeing your children at all. It's important to acknowledge that it's OK to feel sad, angry, anxious or you may be looking forward to having some time to yourself – this is OK too.

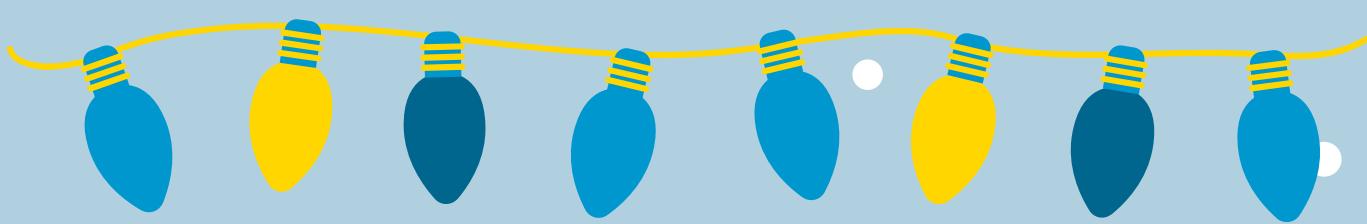
Do make the most of the times when your children aren't with you to do other things. Why not meet up with friends, watch the Boxing Day match, try and get away for a few days, or perhaps look at volunteering on the big day itself.



Do make sure you line up your support network, especially if you are not going to see your children at all, so that in those tough moments you know that someone who cares is there to listen and lean on.

And if you feel like you need some extra help, then you can find a host of support services who can help you [here](#). There is always someone to talk to.





## 5. Be realistic

We all want to try to give our children the best Christmas and it's natural to feel extra pressure when this might be the first Christmas you are apart, or the time you are going to spend together is limited.

It will feel different to before, and you may not have the Christmas you hoped for but try to focus on what works and how you might fit this into Christmas plans in the future. Most families don't get it right straight away and will take time to find what works best for them.

## 6. Make new memories

There will be all sorts of happy, sad and bittersweet memories connected to Christmas past. That's OK and there will be some traditions that it feels important to carry on in some way. But this is also a chance to make new memories and start new traditions, however big or small. Here are some ideas and links you may want to consider :



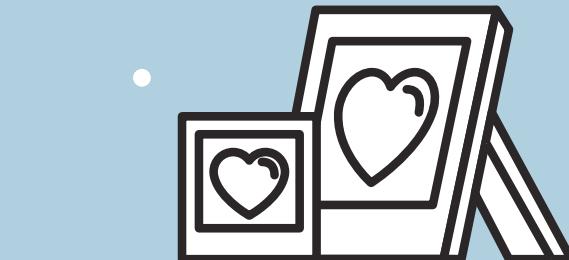
Start the tradition of making your own homemade advent calendar – which the children can open when they are with you.



**Get baking!** Why not make a food gift for those family members you will be visiting over the period. It could be some Christmas Cookies, or some Peppermint Creams, or maybe some Mince Pies we're sure the family will look forward to them every year.



Why not start a tradition of **sleeping under the Christmas tree**. Make up a make-shift bed for you all, and watch Christmas films under the twinkly lights. Just remember that on Christmas Eve Santa will need to be able to get under the tree.



Create your own homemade Christmas cards – use stencils, glitter, coloured paper and stickers and make a day of it.



Take a ride on the **Christmas Light Express**. On the lead up to Christmas take the children out in the car one evening, with some hot chocolate and cookies, and take them on a tour to see the local best and brightest Christmas lights.



Or why not take them to your local outdoor **ice-skating rink** for a skate under the stars, followed by more hot chocolate!

The new traditions you begin do not need to be expensive, or lavish – remember the most important thing for your children are the memories you create together.

## Download your Christmas Parenting Schedule here