

From the Desk of the School Social Worker...

Changing Families and the Holiday Season Tips for Parents and Families

For most kids, the holidays are fun and exciting times filled with happy memories. But for families that are going through changes due to divorce, death, remarriage, separation, or military service, the holidays can be confusing and stressful.

“The holidays often remind children of what’s changed and what’s now different,” says David Fassler, M.D., American Psychiatric Association trustee-at large and a child and adolescent psychiatrist in Vermont. For example, he explains, “a child from a divorced family may feel sad on some level because he misses the ‘intact’ family he used to have. A child whose parent is on active military duty may feel it’s particularly unfair that her daddy or mommy needs to be away over the holidays.” The following are some tips from the American Psychological Association for parents to help their children cope with holiday stress:

1. Discuss holiday plans well in advance, and include your children in the planning process. Kids need some degree of control and predictability.
2. Don’t promise things you can’t produce. For example, don’t promise a parent will be home in time for the holidays if the decision is really out of your control.
3. Don’t try and compensate for an absent family member with lots of gifts. What most kids really want is your time and attention.
4. Uphold and maintain family traditions even if a parent is absent. Kids count on certain traditions. They can have an important grounding effect by letting kids know that even though some things have changed, other things have remained the same.
5. As the parent, take care of yourself. Try to avoid getting overloaded with obligations. If you feel stressed, it increases the pressure and tension on your children.

Most kids, even those dealing with loss or family transitions, do enjoy the holidays. However, preparation, patience, and honesty can help prevent conflict, reduce stress, and enhance the holiday season for the whole family.

Your school social worker is a resource for students and families. Please feel free to contact your school social worker, Jamie Majors, at 322-6201 extension 34220 or by email at jnmajors@volusia.k12.fl.us for help with accessing social service assistance, counseling services, medical insurance, referrals to community resources, or if you need help with your child’s academic, behavioral, or emotional concerns.