

## NEWS from NAN COHEN *Divorce Reality Expert*

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### GETTING THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS WHEN COPING WITH A BREAK-UP

#### Expert Nan Cohen Provides Tip on Coping with Divorce and Separation

Broken traditions, unexpected travel, and new locations for holiday celebrations— these are just the tip of the iceberg for families coping with the realities of relationship break-ups during the holidays. Children are particularly vulnerable, stresses divorce reality expert Nan Cohen, host of “Dealing with Divorce” on Pittsburgh’s KQV-AM. For more than decade tackling divorce-related topics, Nan leads on-air discussions with a professional guest psychologist, children’s expert or lawyer on “Dealing with Divorce”, next airing on KQV-AM 1410, Pittsburgh on Thursday, December 23 at 7:30 pm.

“Christmas and New Year’s Eve have their unique pressures,” says Cohen, who focuses on the personal and wellness concerns around divorce. The results, Cohen says, can be chaotic and emotional if parents don’t anticipate the crush of memories, long-kept traditions, and logistics that include shopping, travel, and even pet care.

Nan Cohen speaks from the experience of her own painful divorce, listening to those wading through the pain and confusion of broken relationships. She is passionate about the effects of divorce on children, who may be overlooked in the midst of parental disagreements and conflicts--long after the papers have been signed.

“Don’t complicate things by focusing on your circumstances,” says Cohen, observing how easily emotions can take hold and be passed on to children. Focus on the joys of the season, your kids and their happiness.”

This includes recognizing that children are often at the hub of a family network that may include several sets of grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and more. “Grandparents suffer a lot,” Cohen says, having observed how difficult it may be for grandparents to have even a few hours with grandchildren when their own child has divorced. Custody arrangements affect many relatives

Cohen suggests six simple rules for those dealing with separation and divorce during holidays:

1. **Be good to yourself and others.** Foremost, patience with one’s self is importance for anyone dealing with a loss, says Cohen. “Feeling good about yourself is so important and those near us will ultimate affect you,” she says. Cohen’s advice includes building new networks and contacts—both professionally and socially. “Co-workers and even your own parents may be well-meaning but may have their own opinions from knowing about your past relationship experience. This is a time to build new relationships and friendships that aren’t connect to your ex, even anecdotally.” Meeting people, getting network to support you.

Regarding parents, “You can’t do this without them,” Cohen says, recognizing that grandparents are often the most positive care-givers and friends a child may have. “But you need to decide what they can do and can’t do for you as you make this transition.”

2. **Keep it simple.** Pare off the layers of influence that add pressure on the children and planning. Be realistic about time for holiday preparation, activities, and travel. Avoid overload and don’t over commit anyone. Some families are dealing with multiple issues these days, including unemployment. Simplifying is almost always a positive approach.
3. **Put the kids in the spotlight.** Your simmering emotions-- which may include anger, resentment or downright confusion--deserve a break.

4. **Ask for help.** Do you need a sitter so you can finish shopping? Are you running out of time to bake? Prioritize, then ask for help from those who care about you. A few hours of child care can provide others with a break and can be considered a gift to you. Ask a friend to add another dozen cookies to her batch and offer something in return. Your time is a precious commodity in keeping priorities in place for your family.
5. **Create new traditions.** Cohen says this is especially important for the parent who may be hosting children in a new location. Decorations, stockings, and gifts are great, but shared activities like picking out and decorating a tree, making cookies, even volunteering are all important choices that make memories and provide quality time between parents and kids.
6. **Allow time outside the new blended family.** While integrating families is a healthy goal, time for each parent with their own children is also important, especially if the split is recent. Plan a special shopping trip for the grandparents or reading a favorite book, says Cohen, are examples that can be personal parts of the holiday. If you have your own traditions, share them in the blended family. It can be a meaningful way to strengthen new bonds.

“Breaking up or managing the details around your past or in-process divorce is never easy.” In turn, focusing on others—your parents, family members, and people in need in your community, can have its rewards.

“There is always someone who needs *you*,” says Cohen. “It doesn’t cost anything except your time. When you focus on being there for others, you won’t regret making a difference where you can.”

What about New Year’s Eve? ask many callers to Cohen’s show.

“It’s not the end of the world to be dateless on as the old year goes out,” she says. “Think of it as a new beginning and treat yourself. Surround yourself with friends and laugh—about anything, anything at all. Even if you can’t bring yourself to leave the house, treat yourself—whether it’s a bubble bath, a new game on the Wii, an extra workout, or a favorite movie.”

Avoid triggers, Cohen says. “Don’t set yourself up for a big cry by playing that song you and your ex cherished. Be realistic, but make it a point to create a positive checklist for New Year’s Eve. Then extend those positive concepts for the month of January and beyond.”

As kids head back to school after the holiday break, some parents are dealing with lawyers, signing papers, and coping with post-holiday emotions around divorce.

“I talk to many people whose divorces will become final in January,” she says. “What is essentially for the convenience of reporting taxes creates a landmark as a new year begins.”

Seize that as an opportunity, Cohen urges, to make the new year YOUR year. Cohen notes that those who are experiencing especially turbulent emotions and difficulties around the holidays should consult a counselor or their spiritual leader.

“It is realistic to feel sadness amid the joy of season,” Cohen says. “Taking care of one’s well-being is one of the best gifts you can give your children and family.”

Day by day, month by month, says Cohen, it will get better.

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