

SURVIVING THE HOLIDAYS

Many estranged parents feel a sense of dread when a holiday approaches. Whether it's their own birthday, the birthday of their estranged child, their grandchild, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter Hannukah or the High Holy Days, they all want to know how they are going to survive it. Some common questions are:

- * What do I tell people when they ask me what I'm going to do with my kids over the holidays or my birthday?
- * How do I manage my feelings of sadness, jealousy, or anger at my friends or children?
- * Are there any activities that are better or worse to do on those days?
- * Will I ever be able to get through a holiday and feel sane and whole again?
- * I just found out that my child is getting married and I wasn't told. How am I supposed to deal with that??

What you should say to others when they ask about your children or grandchildren?

My short answer is whatever you damn well please. In other words, you don't owe anyone anything so you shouldn't feel obligated to say more than you want. If it's an acquaintance or someone you're not close to, you can say something breezy and change the subject. Oh she's off in her own world. I don't see her or the kids as much as I'd like. If they persist you could say, "She's very independent. I don't see her nearly as much as I'd like to. You know kids today." If you want, you could give an update based on the last time you saw your child, grandchild, or something that you heard through the grapevine. And then change the subject.

In other words, you are not ethically obligated to say more than you'd like to about your situation to anyone. Your main goal is get in and out of the conversation and steer it into waters that are more comfortable

for you to swim in. If they insist on showing you pictures of their children and grandchildren, take a deep breath, say something appropriately complimentary, and then suddenly be overcome by a powerful desire to go to the bathroom or get something to eat or drink.