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EQUAL TIME WITH CHILDREN DURING THE HOLIDAYS.

The Christmas and New Year period can be a hectic and stressful time with everyone trying to make sure they catch up with friends and family, some of whom may live quite a distance away. This can be even more stressful and hectic for parents who have separated. They need to arrange for their children to not only spend time with them and their family but also spend time with the other parent and that parent's family.

This can unfortunately lead to arguments between parents, with children being caught in the middle. To try and avoid any additional stress or difficulty during the festive season it often helps if parents have a formal agreement about the time that their children will spend with each of them and their respective families.

There are many ways that this can be achieved depending on the level of co-operation that exists between parents. For many parents, a written agreement that is signed by both of them

and dated, otherwise known as a Parenting Plan, is enough to ensure that everything goes smoothly on the day. Other parents want to try and organise a more long-term arrangement or may have had more difficulties reaching agreements in the past. For these parents, formal Court Orders, still negotiated by agreement between them if possible, may be a better option.

It is recommended that parents try to discuss the arrangements for the Christmas and New Year period as early as possible. The lead up to Christmas is also an extremely busy time in the Family Court and there can be delays in dealing with new matters. This can mean that if parents have problems reaching an agreement between themselves, or are simply not able to do so, then it can be very difficult to have a matter listed before the Court in time for arrangements to be put in place. Parents now also have an obligation, in most cases, to undertake mediation if there is a dispute about the arrangements for their children. Whilst this



process can be highly successful it can also take some time to complete.

Once the arrangements for children are agreed between parents, the type of written agreement that is most suitable will vary depending on the situation. It is recommended that parents obtain legal advice about what type of agreement will best suit them and assistance with formulating the agreement itself. This will ensure that the agreement is recorded in a way that is workable and clearly understood. It will also assist in avoiding any disagreement at a later date about what was intended.

No matter what option may best suit you and your children, it is important to try and start this process well before the holidays arrive. It will not only make planning what is already a very busy time of year much easier but will ensure that Santa is the only one that delivers the surprises on the day.



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