



Separation: Gwyneth Paltrow and Chris Martin (Picture: AP)

## **Lawyers have drawn up seven tips for disappointed divorced parents forced to let their children spend Christmas Day with their ex-partner.**

The advice includes the golden rule - to put a happy face on for the children but do not be afraid to cry on your own and take the chance to watch the TV you want.

The suggestions are based on advice from the support group Be StepWise for the daunting experience of Christmas alone.

Emotions can be drawn and resentment high at time when traditionally families come together, said Lucy Greenwood, of solicitors The International Family Group LLP.

“It is very common in families living apart for the Christmas period,

or some of it, to be alternated between parents even in circumstances where one parent may live abroad,” she said.

“Lawyers can do a lot to help parents who cannot agree arrangements for the festive period to help to resolve these differences through mediation, negotiation or, if absolutely necessary, the court.

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“However, while a very small number of separated parents do manage to spend the day together, this is not always possible and, inevitably one parent will be without the children on all or some of Christmas Day.”

If you are stuck with Christmas without the kids:

1. Set expectations early - yours and your children's. Arrange times and dates early with your ex-spouse and tell the children in an encouraging and supportive way - even if you don't feel like it. Don't tell them you would prefer the children to be with you and how upset you will be missing them opening their presents. See if you can telephone or Skype them on Christmas morning.
2. Create an alternative Christmas for yourself with parents or friends. This can be an opportunity to get closer to them than in the past when the Christmas focus has been on the children.
3. Arrange an alternative Christmas for you and the children. Do something really special that the children will enjoy. Perhaps create a new tradition - the children will love it

4. Shift your perspective to your children's happiness. Speak to them as if you really do wish them a very happy time. Christmas is a huge deal for children - and seeing it from their perspective will also help take your focus off your own sadness. Try to put on a happy and brave face for them but don't be afraid to have a good sob at home to release negative emotions and feel refreshed.

5. Focus on your children's needs for new experiences, love and affection, praise and recognition and responsibility, which are recognised as the most important aspects in their development of children.

6. Having said that, find and enjoy some "Me-time". Looking after your own health and wellbeing is just as important as looking after the children's. With the kids away read that book you've promised yourself, watch the TV you like, go for a walk, have a lie-in in the mornings. Banish any feeling of guilt because you are putting yourself first for once - you deserve it.

7. Speak to your children. Phone regularly (every day or second day) to hear how they're doing. Celebrate with them if they are happy. Listen to them if they are upset. Recognise their feelings. Talk to them about how much you are looking forward to seeing them again.

The advice comes from Alison O'Mahony, the founder of Be Stepwise and a family practitioner, Agnes Bamford, a qualified parent coach and author, and Ms Greenwood..

Be StepWise was founded in 2009 in response to provide information and support for step-parents' family life and offer courses and individual assistance for the step-family.

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