

# *When Everyone Isn't Home for the Holidays*

## Lee's Place Offers Advice for Parents and Children on Coping with Divorce

**By Nathan Spicer (published in *Tallahassee Magazine*)**

While it's commonplace today, the act of divorce creates an often overwhelming amount of emotional distress, logistical problems and – seemingly at the worst of times – complications no one could have foreseen or imagined. During the holidays, the issues can be magnified to the point where both parents and children feel that not only marriages but lives are being split apart.

To help ease the disruption, Lee's Place, a nonprofit grief and loss counseling center, has detailed some coping strategies for dealing with issues affecting parents and children. Holidays traditionally are rooted in large family foundations and sharing with significant others, but divorce forces those involved to reconsider how to manage such important times.

According to Lee's Place, one way to help cope is to make sure parents plan early by discussing with their children and the other parent how the holidays will unfold, letting them know that this year will differ greatly from previous years. For example, children need to understand the importance of visiting a parent's new house and sharing meals with him or her.

In the fortunate event that the parents have maintained an amicable relationship, Lee's Place recommends spending time together with the children to reinforce that the family still can feel like a family, regardless of living situations. If there are obstacles – for example, parents living on opposite ends of the country – or personal issues that pose problems, Karen Lockard, child counselor at Lee's Place, suggests alternative ways for children and their parents to spend quality time together.

“With the advances in technology, you could use a webcam,” she says. “(Parents) can still be a part of the process.”

While that avenue may create a new tradition, old ones may become impossible to follow. Give yourself freedom to create new practices and new beginnings. Lockard is a firm believer in this approach.

“Starting early, looking for those little traditions to make is one of the things that keeps families close. It's the glue,” she says.

Such a tradition can involve spending extra time with your children by playing board games or cooking, for instance. Many children at Lee's Place express a desire to interact more with their parents – not to play with toys or PlayStation 3.

When the negatives seem to outweigh the positives, spend time by yourself to cry or vent, but don't let your children feel guilty or feel like they must cheer you up. To mitigate your loneliness, volunteer or spend more time with friends.

But in the end, the most important thing for parents is to make sure their children are aware that, even though a parent might go away, their love never will.

“That’s the underlying message,” Lockard says.