



The Adult Child's Dilemma:

Divorced Parents, Separate States

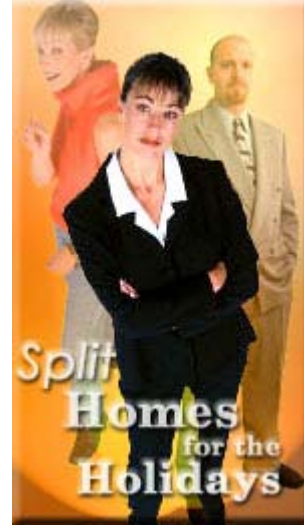
and You are Caught in the Middle...

Dear Dr. Mark,

My friends look forward to Thanksgiving and Christmas, but I dread them. My mom and dad are divorced, can't stand each other and live 1000 miles away from each other (Thank God!). I can't visit one of them for the holidays without the other one getting hurt and ticked off. How do I get my parents to stop ruining the holidays for me?

Caught in the Middle

Female (20) Lansing, Michigan



Dealing with immature divorced parents during the holiday's means you become the parent and take the assertive stand.

Dear Caught in the Middle:

What a pain that your parents put you in the middle. It sounds like *waiting for them to grow up* and make it easier for you to have a relationship with both of them is not going to happen. You'll have a better chance of it working out if you take the bull by the horns and stop their bulls--t before they start up with you.

Write them each this letter:

“Dear Mom and Dad *(reverse the order depending on whom you send it to):*

I am *writing* to both of you because I don't have the confidence that I can speak to either of you without it turning negative and becoming counterproductive. I have done my best to visit each of you for the holidays since you got divorced, but it usually deteriorates when each of you resent my visiting the other. Both of you will ALWAYS be my parents and I will not allow either of you to make me take sides against the other.

In order for me to look forward to and not dread the holidays, this is what I have decided to do--- every year, I will alternate spending Thanksgiving with one of you and Christmas with the other. It makes little difference to me which holiday I spend with whom. If you want to reverse the order one year, the two of you will need to talk to each other and arrange it. And how you figure it out is none of my business.

If either of you starts pushing me to dislike the other, I will not listen to you and may even consider not visiting you when it's your next turn to have me. I think it's a sad commentary on my relationship with each of you if we have nothing better to talk about besides how rotten my other parent is and I will no longer go along with it. So we need to come up with some other basis for our relationship, which I think is long overdue.

I'm not doing this to punish either of you. I'm doing this because I love each of you even if you can't stand each other. I don't want to start trying to avoid seeing both of you for the holidays, but I need each of you to help me. This would be the best Christmas present you can give me.

Love, (your name).

P.S. Since I've already agreed to spend Thanksgiving with mom, I'm going to visit dad for Christmas (which is what we already had planned anyway)."