

HEALTH BEAT

Holidays can be time of anxiety

The changing structure of family life can cause multiple difficulties during the holidays. The spiraling divorce rate over the past 20 years has created myriad family obligations — parents, step-parents, in-laws and children.

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The pull of multiple demands can cause a great deal of anxiety and frustration. It is a challenge for each individual to establish realistic time limits. Many times, it helps to extend the holiday period

by creating "special days." This approach involves scheduling special celebrations with different family members over a period of weeks.

The structure of today's family makes it unrealistic to combine all family in one setting. The ideal image of an intact nuclear family gathering together in harmony is a rarity in the 1990s.

Families of divorce face special issues. Many times the children want to share special moments with both parents. This is a time when the children's needs must be primary. Parents need to give strong consideration to putting adult differences aside and focusing on the needs of the children.

One of the most difficult challenges for divorced couples is to successfully work as a parenting

team. Divorce is the end of a marriage; it does not mean the end of a family. Parents need to develop the ability to co-parent effectively — including ways to communicate, negotiate and navigate through the events that bring parents together in their children's lives. Effective co-parenting is a priority to minimize holiday heartache for children.

A helpful resource is *Families Apart* by Melinda Blau. It can be

ordered from *Courage to Change* at (800) 440-4003. Careful planning and establishing realistic limitations is the key to minimizing heartache and increasing holiday joy.

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