

Holiday schedules

Making time to see everyone in the family is tough. Here's how to make the most of what you get

By Melissa Erickson
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Holidays can be an opportunity for disappointment for grandparents who are left out of celebrations and gatherings. Survive the holiday season with proper planning and the right attitude.

"The holidays can be hard to navigate. People can't show up everywhere. Grandparents understand their kids can't always celebrate with them, but once grandchildren enter the picture it becomes more fraught," said psychologist Dr. Laura Markham, author of "Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids: How To Stop Yelling and Start Connecting."

"Keep in mind that families are different and the ways we celebrate holidays and even what holidays we celebrate are very diverse," said Sheri Steinig, special projects director at Generations United, a nonprofit that brings older adults and children together through a variety of programs.

To survive the holidays with all parties on happy terms, grandparents need to understand the many factors that come into play, Markham said. Some families successfully

alternate holidays; others celebrate with only mom's or dad's side. Maybe a new baby changes travel plans or some members are opting for a family vacation.

"Be grateful for what time you do get, but don't expect it will happen every year. You are seeing your grandchildren based on their parents' schedule," Markham said.

"It is important for grandparents to understand that parents are in the challenging position of balancing multiple obligations and desires, whether it is dealing with many sets of grandparents/siblings/other family/friends, vacation plans, school schedules, work schedules, health issues and budgetary constraints."

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The situation goes both ways, since many grandparents also have to make the decision about where they spend holidays and decide among different children and sets of grandkids, Steinig said.

Even if your feelings are hurt, try not to take things personally, which never helps, Markham said.

"Avoid making it something it doesn't have to be, because that can ruin relationships," she said.

Even broaching the subject of where family members will spend the holidays can be tense.

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"Be calm and go into it with a positive attitude," Markham said.

Open communication and flexibility are key.

"Both grandparents and adult children need to be able to express their feelings. ... Remember, just because families can't be together on a holiday does not mean that they love each other any less," Steinig said.

If you can't be together in person, connect virtually.

"Families could connect over FaceTime, Google Duo, Skype or other video chat applications. Many have group chat functions, and some can even connect up to eight people," Steinig said. "You can share opening gifts or playing games or plan for a quiet time when family members can have a meaningful conversation."

Being away from family on a holiday is lonely, but be sure to find a way to meet your own needs, Markham said.

"Create a new tradition — maybe a special holiday trip or spa day with a partner or friend. Do something that makes the holiday feel special for you. The goal is to avoid feeling like a victim," she said.

"Families should focus on ways to build strong family connections between grandparents and grandchildren not just during the holidays," Steinig said. "Look for ways to engage with other generations outside of your family during the holidays and all year-round."