

Taking care of the kids

When divorce, sickness, deployment, or obstacles conflict with holiday and special events



At home is aglow with the twinkling of holiday lights in the window, gingerbread houses nestle serenely on the mantle, and the air is filled with the scent of the apple pie, steaming, fresh from the oven.

Or perhaps the house is awash in the the soft glow of the Menorah candles, a perfect arrangement of delicious festive foods is heaped on the table, the aroma of the holiday permeates the room.

Later extended family bear gifts and hugs for the family. Family members gather around the table as the room fills with laughter and happiness of family reuniting.

While many people view this image as the “perfect family,” in reality, many others do not share this image. Their reality differs as 54 percent of children suffer from divorced and split parents. Moreover many children, with are adopted and away from their biological parents or separated by circumstance during the holidays.

Even with what might appear as different ideals of what is said to be “the perfect family”, perfection does not exist. For many these situations can be for the best or differ because of situations. How these are delicately handled matters in taking care of the kids, regardless of the event, days or holidays, counselors said and many students shared.

“I’ve kind of just come to learn to accept it. Even though my mother isn’t here I kind of have a step-mother figure, or mother-figure, but I wouldn’t say it’s the same anymore.” a Willow Springs student said, not wanting to

reveal her true identity. “It is way better living with my dad because even when my mom isn’t there I always have someone there caring for me, and I love that and he is always there for me no matter what,” she said.

The winter holidays hold a reputation of bringing families together, even if distance is an obstacle. The holidays are a time of giving thanks and spending time with family most agree even if a parent is stationed overseas or the family is divorced.

Fifty four percent of kids in the U.S. have divorced parents, which can create conflict when planning for the holidays. Multiple students with divorced parents spend the winter holidays with both parents, creating lots of traveling for the students and stress for the parents.

“[The bad thing about having divorced parents during the holidays] is not having your whole family in one room celebrating together,” eighth-grader, Maddie Smittle, said.

“Well, I get two Christmases and twice as many presents. It’s actually a major perk to have divorced parents,” Smittle said.

There are thousands of kids in the U.S. whose parents serve in the military, and many don’t have the privilege of spending the winter holidays with their parents. Some have the opportunities to FaceTime or Skype while their parents are stationed overseas, but not all have this opportunity.

WSMS student Taiden Connor’s mom serves stationed outside the country. Recently, WSMS advisory classes had the opportunity to FaceTime her and some other troops on Veteran’s Day. Connor shared other personal experiences aside from the recent Skype at WSMS.

“[When my mom can’t come home] I spend time with my uncles, aunties, and brothers, but when she doesn’t come home it’s kind of hard because I don’t have the chance to be with her to celebrate,” eighth-grader, Connor, said.

While Taiden’s mom is away he lives with fellow eighth-grade student Noah Naidoo and has become a part of his

family. Because Taiden can’t always spend the holidays with his biological family, he visits family gatherings and spends some holidays with the Naidoos.

“Last year Taiden did spend Christmas and New Year’s with us, but this year he is going to spend the holidays with his family. Usually he goes to his dad’s house or his brother comes and gets him from Houston. It’s fun when Taiden spends the holidays with us, and it’s always great to have someone your age at the holiday event, but sometimes I wonder how he feels not spending the holidays with his actual family,” Naidoo said.

Winter holidays are not the only special occasions some kids aren’t around their parents Birthdays, Valentine’s Day, Easter, and other seasonal holidays are other holidays that might have to be split among families.

Although it can be difficult not having family around during important events and holiday, students have learned to find the bright-side to the problem.

A number of kids are in programs that work alongside Court Appointed Special Advocates (CAPA), an association that thrives to have a safe, permanent home for every child who has been a victim of abuse or neglect.

“CASA/GAL volunteers are appointed by judges to watch over and advocate for abused and neglected children, to make sure they don’t get lost in the overburdened legal and social service system or languish in inappropriate group or foster homes,” http://www.casaforchildren.org/site/c.mtJSJ7MPiSE/b.5301303/k.6FB1/About_Us__CASA_for_Children.htm said. “Volunteers stay with each case until it is closed and the child is placed in a safe, permanent home. For many abused children, their CASA/GAL volunteer will be the one constant adult presence in their lives.”

According to ifstudies.org, in 2010 more than 1.5 million people in state or U.S. federal prisons were parents, and another 750,000 individuals were in jail. Close to six out of ten incarcerated parents received no personal visits from their children in 2010, and 84 percent of parents in federal prisons are held more than 100 miles away from where they lived previously. Approximately 43 percent lived over 500 miles away from their prior residence.

The website conducted a series of interviews with 62 individuals regarding relatives who had been/were at the time incarcerated.

“We were not expecting incarceration to enter these narratives of care and loss, but 12 of the 62 people we interviewed, either the interviewee, a sibling, or a parent

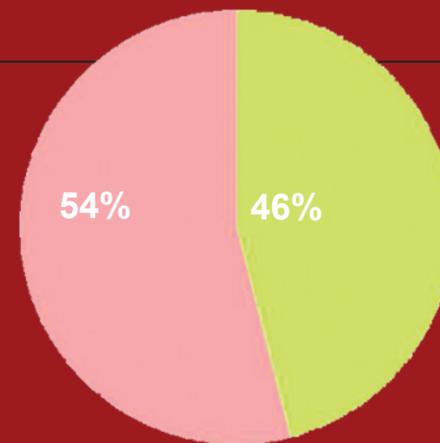
had been or was incarcerated at the time we talked,” Amy Zietlow for ifstudies.org said.

“Most imprisonments were related to non-violent or drug-related offenses. Our interviewees’ memories of an imprisoned family member spanned from their childhood in the 80s and 90s to the present, with one parent dying in prison. All realized that their concept of home changed when a loved one went to prison,” Zietlow said. School counselors shared other strategies and struggles with holidays separated from loved ones.

“For students whose nuclear family is not here in north Texas, it may mean lots of traveling. It may mean celebrating on different days, maybe holding multiple celebrations, and maybe having to be creative in the ways they connect with family. For many families, traveling may not be possible due to work/time constraints and cost,” Li-Z counselor, Kay Bordelon, said.

-Claire Easley, Editor-in-Chief, Parker Post, Managing Editor

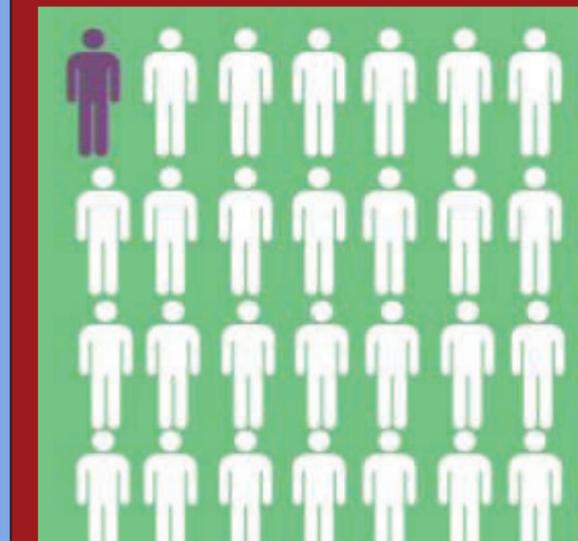
Children living with two parents in their first marriage



Pink- Children under the age of 18 not living with two parents in their first marriage

Green- Children under the age of 18 living with two parents in their first marriage

More than **900,000** children have experienced the deployment of one or both parents multiple times.



1 in 28 children in the United States had an incarcerated parent.

Tips for people in difficult situations:

1. Don't isolate yourself
2. Surround yourself with people who make you happy
3. Give back to the people around you