



MEDIA RELEASE

18 DECEMBER 2007

PROTECT CHILDREN FROM STRESS DURING THE FESTIVE SEASON

Family Relationship Services Australia, the peak body for the family relationships sector, understands the reality that for families, the holiday season can be a very stressful time.

"Most parents want the best for their children over the holiday season; many go to a lot of trouble to get just the right gift or arrange family gatherings. For those who celebrate Christmas, children's excitement and anticipation in the days or weeks leading up to this special day is as much a part of the ritual as the giving and receiving of presents and the time spent with loved ones", said Executive Director Sam Page.

While the season can be a very special time, it can also be a time of stress and difficulty for adults- a time when even the strongest of family relationships can be sorely tested.

"This can be a particularly difficult time for parents who have separated or formed new relationships and may need to negotiate time spent with children over the holidays. Making arrangements to share time with children can lead to conflict or frustration between parents, and has the potential to take away from the anticipation and joy that children experience. Protecting children from adult stress is a shared responsibility; we can all play a role."

Ms Karen Morris, Deputy CEO of Interrelate Family Centres commented that "difficult decisions do need to be made by divorced or separate parents about how contact is managed and when extended family members and friends spend time with the children."

"Sometimes it's necessary to let go of certain things, such as being there on Christmas morning, or splitting your children's Christmas into two or more family events, in the best interest of your children".

There are a number of ways parents, extended family members and friends can support the children and the broader family group to have the best possible holiday period:

- Be prepared to compromise and make new traditions if that will work best for the kids.
- Don't feel you have to please everyone- put children's needs first.
- Be realistic- don't try to squeeze in too many activities or make everything perfect.
- If you can, resolve or set aside other differences at Christmas time.
- Support children to share time with other family members without feeling that they have to choose between you or be responsible for your happiness.
- It really is the thought that counts- making children feel special is much more important than spending a lot of money.

"Rather than forcing several Christmas celebrations into one or two days, utilise this time to create new rituals and Christmas celebrations that allow you to spend quality time with your children. For separated fathers, accessing children over the holiday season can bring many emotions to the surface. It is vital that men reach out to friends, family or external 24/7 supports such as Mensline

Australia to circumvent feelings of isolation, frustration and anger”, explains Wendy Sturgess, CEO of Mensline Australia.

“For new stepfamilies, remember that relationships develop over time. It may be best to spend time together in shorter timeframes such as a mealtime or one day together rather than heading off for a month long holiday”, says Steve Martin, Executive Officer, Stepfamilies Association of Victoria. “It may also help to plan lots of activities, toys or games for the kids, giving some time for you to sit back and relax a little but allow for the fact that some teenagers may not want to be involved at all.”

Despite the best of intentions, relationships are complex. If tensions start to run high or you are experiencing strong emotions, help is available. To talk to someone skilled in providing relationship support and advice, please contact:

Family Relationships Advice Line 1800 050 321 open from 8am-8pm (Mon to Fri) and 10am-4pm on Saturdays (closed public holidays)- free call number, offering advice to families affected by relationship or separation issues

Australian Relationship and Parenting Line 1300 365 859- 9am-9pm (AEST)

Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800- 24 hr/7 days a week (open public holidays) or send email counsellor@kidshelp.com.au (Can take up to 2 weeks to reply)

Mensline Australia 13 78 99 78- 24 hr/ 7 days a week- free call number for men with family and relationship issues

Lifeline 13 11 14- 24hr/ 7 days a week- cost of a local call

Violence Against Women- Australia Says No 1800 200 526- 24hr/ 7 days a week- free call confidential helpline

Stepfamilies 03 9481 1500 - (Victoria) 9am-5pm Monday to Friday (AEST)- offering support and advice to step and blended families

WEBSITES

www.kidshelp.com.au- for young people wanting to talk about their concerns, fears or hopes.

www.relationshipsonline.gov.au- to find a service skilled in providing support and advice.

-ENDS-

FRSA Media Contact: Bonnie Montgomery, 02 6162 1811 or 0406 628 239

Family Relationship Services Australia is the national peak body for over 100 family relationship service providers, operating in more than 400 locations across Australia. FRSA's vision is for an Australian society that is enriched through respectful relationships in all their diversity.