

# COLLABORATIVE Practice Tips

## November/December 2021

A monthly bulletin from the CP Cal Practice Excellence Committee

The Practice Excellence Committee is pleased to offer tips to help you increase your Collaborative cases and achieve *practice excellence*.

Please send us your comments and questions! Email us at [info@cpcal.com](mailto:info@cpcal.com)

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### **Preparing Our Collaborative Family and Ourselves for the Holidays**

Holidays bring a lot of busy-ness, as well as a lot of business. The holidays evoke many emotions as families change. As we return to hosting and attending holiday events, there are competing considerations for both the families we work with AND our own individual feelings and perspective relating to returning to holiday traditions. For some people, larger holiday gatherings are nostalgic, anticipated, and desired. For others, holiday gatherings can create a myriad of stressors, including health considerations (such as covid precautions), family avoidance, and dreaded discussion topics like religion, politics, and personal lifestyle.

There are many ways to support parents and children as they weather the first year (or two) of separation. We have an opportunity to help parents learn to lean into a difficult time and work together. Likewise, it is very important for us as collaborative practitioners to continue to practice mindfulness of triggers – our own and for others – as well as consistent self-care as we experience the perspective and emotions that are brought to the holiday table.

Tip #1 - Help clients take care of themselves. Holidays are an important time for many families. Whether our clients have children or not, the first holiday without a spouse and/or without children (for some) can be an emotional time. The sense of loss will likely be increased at this time of year and clients may

experience a myriad of other emotions as well. Prepare your clients. Talk to them about self-care during the holidays and what they can do to make it through a challenging time.

Tip #2 - Plan, Plan, Plan. The collaborative team can help parents/couples look ahead to the winter holidays, as well as anniversaries, birthdays, and other special days. Include holidays and special days in your meeting agendas well in advance of the holidays, as early as September or October. Planning early for the holidays and other special days models the benefits of looking ahead and not avoiding or ignoring difficult conversations. Anticipation without problem-solving is overwhelming to parents. Waiting until the last minute can create feelings of desperation and conflict as couples face assumptions of being together or separate for the holidays or how they might share a holiday with their children.

Tip #3 - Predict potential feelings of grief as your clients approach traditions for the first time after a separation. Help by normalizing the grief evoked by the holidays for all family members. Invite clients to explore gatherings with friends and extended family to celebrate the season and to ward off feeling alone.

Tip #4 - Facilitate conversations with parents about specific individual events during the holidays. What family traditions does the family have about dinners, presents, gatherings, and activities at Thanksgiving, Chanukah, Christmas, Santa, and New Year's? Brainstorm solutions: Can events be done at both houses at different times? Would they alternate the holiday annually or each alternate half of the holiday time? Think about traditions with extended family and how to include them.

- Help parents think carefully about whether they can emotionally manage being together, e.g., for a two-hour dinner, but perhaps not a whole day.
- Encourage parents to create new traditions when they are caring for their children, such as tree trimming night; going to see holiday lights, a holiday play, or ballet; visiting a holiday theme park.

Tip #5 - Guide couples and parents in how to talk about their divorce process with friends and family members. Can they find ways to express to others how important it is that they have an amicable divorce and want peace for each other and especially for their children? When family gathers it is a good time to remind our clients not to speak ill of the spouse not in attendance and not in front of or within earshot of their children.

Tip #6 - Discourage bringing in a new partner to family celebrations in the first year after a divorce. There are already many adjustments everyone is making to accept the divorce and a new structure of the family (including their extended family and friends). Help them to be realistic and to think through how a familiar family gathering might be what they and their children need to cope with holiday gatherings.

Tip #7 – Do not forget to debrief with clients how the holidays unfolded afterward. Acknowledge how the couple was successful at planning ahead for the holidays and how they might also meet to plan for the upcoming year well in advance to discuss sharing the children for vacations, arranging camps, school and extra-curricular activities and educational pursuits. Encourage clients to continue post-divorce communication and meetings to plan together.

Tip #8 - Be realistic about your own work schedule and communicate this to your clients so that they know when you are (and are not) available. Don't forget to carve out time for yourself too! Winter can be long and dark and it's important to plan to have time to ourselves, as well as with our families to play, relax and clear our heads!

The Practice Excellence Committee wishes all in the Collaborative Community, and the families we work with, peace throughout the holidays and the New Year.

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**From the PEC:**

**Pause and Be Grateful**

We chose to work in Collaborative because we wanted to live our values. This is not a choice we can make just once and forget about it, though. It's an exercise we have to do every day. So, today, choose to regulate your emotions with mindful breathing. Consider how grateful you are for all of the twists and turns, adventures and misadventures, which led you to where you are today. Think of your most challenging client or colleague and imagine you can telepathically beam to them your compassion for their pain and your hope that they can find peace. Sit in your office with absolutely nothing to do, in an hour which could be filled with a Collaborative case, and just let the Universe know you're available.

This is the "think method" of marketing. After you've done all of this and are calm, centered, happy and inspired, write a blog or two, just to make the world a better place. "If you make it, they will come."



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