

Celebrating the Holidays With Children You Foster

Conflicting loyalties and lost dreams often make the holidays a difficult time for children in foster care. Just as studies show that holidays are stressful times for most of us, these reactions may be compounded for youth placed in your home. Here are some questions and answers that will help you navigate the holiday season.

How can my family make it easier for the children in foster care while they are in our home?

- Talk about the holiday season ahead of time. Share how your family spends time during the holidays and which holidays you celebrate. Ask the kids in your care about the holidays they like to celebrate and the ways they do so. Talking about the holidays gives children time to anticipate the upcoming activities and ask questions.
- Ask what celebrations are like in the child's birth home, and help them imagine what to expect in your home. Much of what we assume to be commonplace can be new to the children you foster.
- Share the religious meanings the holidays may have for your family, and ask the child to share with you. Talk about customs and activities.
- As you learn about the religious beliefs, customs, and activities of the children you foster, try to incorporate at least some of



their traditions into your traditions.

- Some parents try to keep the holidays low key in order to help minimize the stress children may be feeling at this time.

How can we work with birth families during the holidays?

- Again, ask children about their experiences and try to incorporate some of their traditions. The children placed in your home may miss some activities that they experienced with their family or in a previous placement.
- If possible, ask the child's family members about their holiday traditions, beliefs, and observances. Although you may feel stretched at the holidays, try to coordinate schedules with the birth families. This gives the children a chance to share what is familiar while experiencing new traditions.
- This is a good time for the youth in your home to make small

gifts and send cards to their birth families or old neighbors and friends.

- Reassure the child, if you can, about the safety of their birth family. This is a time when many children in care worry about them. They may need to hear that it is okay for them to be safe and cared for during this time of struggle.

Continued on page 2

What are some of the ways I can help the children who I foster get through the holidays? What are some signs of grief or sadness that I can look for?

- Be prepared for the sadness and grief. Talk with the child about how they are feeling throughout the season.
- Give the children time and space to grieve.
- Grief takes many forms and may be exhibited in lots of ways, including:
 - Reverting back to younger behaviors developmentally.
 - Soiling themselves or bedwetting.
 - Becoming withdrawn and isolated.
 - Having temper tantrums.
 - Being rebellious.
 - Complaining more than usual.

What are some things we can do to make family get-togethers easier?

- Talk about upcoming events and the people who will be there. If you cannot get together before the big event, introduce the children to family and friends who will be at the celebration by going through pictures.
- Prepare them for the “characters” in your family and also tell them about other children who might be there.
- Describe your celebrations in detail. For example, are they loud? Silly? Sacred? Quiet? How many people? What foods do you eat?
- Describe the home or place where the event will be held, and how things usually proceed.
- Be realistic about it—do not make your celebrations seem perfect, but do not stress the challenges that are part of all family events.
- Give the child a camera so that they can record the celebration, and also give them



one for holiday visits with their birth families.

What can I do to help my children learn what is expected of them at family celebrations?

This is an opportunity to teach the behaviors and manners that you would like the youth in your care to learn. Go over basic manners such as “please” and “thank you.”

- Explain the expectations of children prior to family get-togethers, and practice those behaviors ahead of time.
- Use role playing at home so that they can practice.

- Tell family and friends about the children in your care, while maintaining confidentiality, and attempt to introduce them to each other before the holiday celebration. It’s a good time to remind others about the confidentiality you honor concerning the children you foster, and it might be a good time to practice

some polite but firm answers to some questions.

- Be sure to ask the children what they would like to have shared about themselves.

We hope these tips will help you as you prepare for the holiday season.



Resources on page 3

Resources

From the [Lending Library](#)

- Fostering Across Wisconsin Newsletter: [Honoring the Holiday Traditions of Children in Care](#)

Training & Resources From [Champion Classrooms](#)

- [Let's Talk: Navigating the Holidays](#)

Additional Resources

- [When a child can't be home for Christmas](#)
- [The Holidays in Foster Care: Why Things Might Get Rough](#)
- [Foster Care & The Holidays](#)
- [The Holidays Aren't Always a Celebration. It's Much More Complicated for Foster Youth](#)
- [Getting Through the Holidays](#)
- [Helping Young People in Foster Care Through the Holidays](#)
- [Celebrating the Holidays In Foster Care: A Guest Post](#)
- [The Special Kind of Trauma Children in Foster Care Face During the Holidays](#)