**Preparing Youth and Care Givers for the Holiday Season**

**Curtesy of Foster and Adoptive Care Coalition**

As we approach the holiday season it is important to understand that this time of year can be particularly hard for youth in out of home placement. Here are some tips for preparing for the holiday season.

1. **Prepare the foster youth in your care for the holidays in your home**

Have a discussion with the young person about your family’s holiday customs. Do you celebrate over multiple days, or is there one “main” celebration? Are there religious customs? Will gifts be exchanged? What should they wear? Who will they meet? Will there be visitors to the home? Will they be taken on visits to the homes of other family or friends? And in all of these events, will your youth be expected to participate? Knowing what to expect will help to decrease anxiety around the holidays. Avoid surprises and you will decrease seasonal tensions. Of equal importance is to help them talk about their memories of the holidays. Find ways to incorporate any traditions they remember into your family’s celebration.

1. **Prepare friends and family before you visit**

Let people know in advance about new family members in your home. Surprising a host or hostess at the door with a “new” foster youth may set up an awkward situation — such as a scramble to set an extra place at the table — making the young person feel like an imposition right from the start of the visit. Your preparation of friends should help cut down on awkward, but reasonable questions such as “who are you?” or “where did you come from? “Also prepare the youth for what to expect.

1. **Remember confidentiality**

You may receive well-intended but prying questions from those you visit with over the holidays. If your young person is new to your home, it is natural that family members ask questions about your youth’s background. As much as possible, have these conversations ahead of time, without the youth present. Understand that questions are generally not meant to be insensitive or rude, but simply come from a place of not knowing much about foster care. Pre-establish the boundaries for information sharing. Discuss with your young person how they would like to be introduced and what is appropriate to share about their history with your family and friends.

1. **Facilitate visits with loved ones**

The holidays can be a busy time for everyone including foster parents and caseworkers. But it is especially important during this time of year to help your young person arrange for visits with loved ones. Don’t allow busy schedules to mean the postponement of these important visits. Try to get permission for your youth to make phone calls to relatives. A youth may wish to extend holiday wishes to relatives and friends from an old neighborhood but may need your help getting phone numbers together. Use the opportunity to help the youth develop their own address book. If the youth cannot visit, consider including their birth families in your thoughts and prayers. If you are making homemade gifts, consider making ones for the birth family, even if they cannot be delivered immediately. This is a time when many foster youths feel deeply conflicted about their birth families and worry about them. It is a good time to let them know it is okay for them to be safe and cared for even if their birth family is struggling. Reassure them, if you can, about the safety and care of those they are missing.

1. **Help them make sure their loved ones are okay**

Young people may worry that their family members are struggling through the holidays. If homelessness has been a regular issue, the winter season may bring cold weather and extreme hardship. Your youth may experience guilt if they feel a loved one is struggling while they, the youth, are living in comfort. Knowing that a biological parent or sibling has shelter from the cold or has their other basic needs met may ease a young person’s mind through the always emotional holidays.

1. **Understand and encourage your youth’s own traditions and beliefs**

Encourage discussion about the holiday traditions your young person experienced prior to being in foster care, or even celebrations they liked while living with other foster families. Incorporate the traditions the youth cherish into your own family celebration, if possible. Use the opportunity to investigate the youth’s culture and research customary traditions. If the young person holds a religious belief different from yours, or if their family did, check into the traditions customarily surrounding those beliefs.

1. **Understand if they pull away**

Despite your best efforts, a young person may simply withdraw during the holidays. Understand that this detachment most likely is not intended to be an insult or a reflection of how they feel about you, but rather is their own coping mechanism. Allow for “downtime” during the holidays that will allow the youth some time to themselves if they need it (although some youth would prefer to stay busy to keep their mind off other things — you will need to decide based on your knowledge of the young person). Be sure to fit in one-on-one time, personal time for your youth and you to talk through what they are feeling during this emotional and often confusing time of year.

**Between Families Newsletter  
Training Questions  
Preparing Youth and Caregivers for the Holiday Season**

**November 2021**

**Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Signature:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONAIRRE FOR ½ HOUR CREDIT AND SUBMIT TO YOUR ASSIGNED FOSTER CARE WORKER**

1. It is okay to share the foster child in your home’s detailed story of why they are in care and what is going on with their case with your extended family that you will spend time with during the holiday season.

True False

1. List 3 tips from above that you will implement as you prepare for this holiday season.

1.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

2.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

3.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Young people may worry that their \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_are \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_through the holidays.
2. Who should you prepare for holidays?
3. Youth
4. Relatives
5. Friends
6. All of the above
7. Have you asked the foster children in your home about their holiday traditions and memories thus far?

Yes No

1. This is a time when many foster youths feel \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ about their birth families and worry about them.
2. What discussions can you have with your foster children about your family’s holiday customs?

a. Will there be visitors to the home?

b. will your foster child be expected to participate?

c. Do you celebrate over multiple days, or is there one “main” celebration?

d. Will they be taken on visits to the homes of other family or friends?

e. All the above

1. Surprising a host or hostess at the door with a “new” foster youth may set up an awkward situation.

True False

1. Allow for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_during the holidays that will allow the youth some time to themselves if they need it.
2. You should incorporate the traditions the youth cherish into your own family celebration, if possible.

True False

**Answers**

1. False

2. any 3 tips they list is acceptable

3. Family members, struggling

4. D

5. self-assessment any answer is acceptable

6. Deeply Conflicted

7. E

8. True

9. downtime

10. True