Between Families Newsletter December 2021

**The Special Kind of Trauma Children in Foster Care Face During the Holidays**

**https://www.forthechildren.org/blog-posts/the-special-kind-of-trauma-children-in-foster-care-face-during-the-holidays**

The holidays should be a time for joy, laughter, good cheer and good food.

But for children in foster care, it can be a rather fraught period. At a time when the focus is on families coming together, being separated from biological parents or siblings can initiate strong feelings of loneliness, anxiety, sadness or fear.

Even when children are happy to be with their foster families and away from an abusive home, experiencing the holidays in a new household with unfamiliar traditions can surface up all kinds of complicated feelings.

Due to the coronavirus outbreak, this holiday season could shape up to be one of the most traumatic for children in foster care. We are seeing an epidemic within the pandemic — an epidemic of child abuse and neglect that’s going unseen because authority figures like teachers and coaches aren’t around to spot problems when schools are closed. Children are also spending more time at home, in closer proximity to their abusers.

Additionally, there are signs that child sex trafficking has increased during the pandemic. Crisis calls to the National Trafficking Hotline have spiked 40% over pre-pandemic rates, according to the anti-trafficking charity, Polaris.

To be sure, not everyone feels jolly around the holidays. Depression and anxiety have been unwelcome guests at many a family gathering.

But for children in foster care, the trauma can be acute. During this time, they can be extremely vulnerable to highly emotional responses. Here are some reasons why, along with steps that foster families can take to help mitigate these issues:

**Strange surroundings, people and traditions:**Every family observes the season differently. These celebrations might be very different from what the child is used to experiencing. Holiday gatherings can also mean more strangers coming around. Foster families may find themselves doing more traveling outside of the home. The net effect is that children in foster care may be triggered by all of the unfamiliar faces and places.

What foster families can do: Keep kids well informed about your holiday plans. Invite them to share their positive family traditions and incorporate them into your celebration. Ask them about special foods, decorations or activities that they might be interested in. Make sure they feel included and involved, but be understanding if they’re slow to participate in your celebrations.

**More severe feelings of separation:**It’s traumatic whenever children are separated from their family, even when it’s done for their own safety. But these feelings of fear, grief and loss are very likely to be more pronounced around the holidays. Just like adults, children see the holidays as a special time for families to be together, so it’s a sad and harsh reminder that they’re not with their own biological family, whatever the reasons may be.

What foster families can do: Ask children in your care if they have someone special that they would like to connect with for the holidays and help them reach out in a safe manner. Put yourself in the shoes of the biological parents, despite their past mistakes or bad behavior. Take an empathetic approach, and facilitate appropriate contact if possible. Overall, help children to stay connected to the supportive community that they had prior to entering your house.

**A glaring reminder of what they have been missing:**Sometimes when children in foster care experience a safe, supportive and positive family environment for the first time, they may actually come away feeling angry, bitter or sad because they realize what they’ve been missing all along. This phenomenon may be more likely to happen during the holidays. Just know that what may seem like a very festive affair to you may come across as tragically sad to the child in your care.

What foster families can do: Be understanding and allow children to feel everything they need to feel, especially during this sensitive time. Give the space to be angry and sad. Ask open-ended questions to get them to communicate their feelings. Gently invite them into your family festivities, but be empathetic to their conflicted emotions.

**Between Families Newsletter  
Training Questions  
The Special Kind of Trauma Children in Foster Care Face During the Holidays  
December 2021**

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

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

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

1. Children in foster care, the holidays can be\_\_\_\_\_\_ period.

A) scary

B) fraught

C) happy

D) anxious

2. (True/False) Being separated from biological parents or siblings can initiate strong feelings of loneliness, anxiety, sadness or fear.

3. Child abuse and neglect that’s going unseen because authority figures like \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ aren’t around to spot problems when schools are closed.

4. Signs that child sex trafficking has spiked by what percentage?

A) 30%

B) 45%

C) 50%

D) 40%

5. What have been unwelcome guest at family gatherings?

A) anxiety

B) depression

C) loneliness

D) A and B

E) A,B, and C

6. (True/False) During the holidays, they can be extremely happy.

7. Invite them to share their positive \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_and incorporate them into your celebration.

8. What are some reasons why children in foster care can have high emotional responses?

A) **Strange surroundings, people and traditions**

B) **A glaring reminder of what they have been missing**

C) **More severe feelings of separation**

D) All the above

9. Put yourself in the shoes of the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ parents, despite their past mistakes or bad behavior.

10. (True/False) Give the space to be angry and sad. Ask open-ended questions to get them to communicate their feelings.

**ANSWERS in Red.**

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