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*Shelter from  
the Storm*

## ***Honoring the Holiday Traditions of Children in Care***



When you ask people, “What’s the best thing about the holidays?” you’ll probably hear “being with family.” Or a story about their family’s favorite holiday tradition.

For children in out-of-home care, family and familiar traditions may be the two things they’re missing the most. Holidays, for them, can be an emotionally charged experience. Triggers can create conflicted and complicated feelings that may result in a variety of emotional responses. Being prepared for the possibility that such responses may arise can help the holidays flow more smoothly.

While children in care may miss their family members and family traditions, they also want to feel included in holiday activities with their foster family. This can create feelings of divided loyalties.

Consider starting a conversation

with the children in your care about past holidays with their family. What was the most fun thing they did together? Was there anything they did every year that they’d like to do this year in your home? You may even have the opportunity to talk with the child’s birth parents about how they have celebrated in the past. Perhaps you can incorporate some of these special activities into your own family celebrations. This can go a long way toward helping the child maintain connections with important holiday traditions.

We all want the holidays to be fun and stress-free. We look forward to revisiting long-cherished traditions and creating new memories. With open communication, flexibility, and advance planning, you can help create a holiday full of “best memories” for everyone.



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## ***Working with Birth Families for the Holidays***

The joy of the holidays always seems to include some measure of stress. Even so, with some pre-planning and foresight, your family and your child's birth family can work together to create positive connections and warm holiday memories. Families have found the following strategies helpful in planning for the holidays.

If you can, **begin talking with birth families and caseworkers about the holidays now.** Will the family want time with their children to exchange gifts? How and when will the children receive those gifts? Let the family and caseworker know how you expect to spend the holidays.

You can **ask birth family members for suggestions** of what to do to celebrate the holidays. They may be open to sharing their traditions and how they might like you to honor them in your home. Depending on what holidays they celebrate, you could exchange a decoration to be displayed in your respective homes.

Perhaps you can give the children in your care the option to write a letter, create and/or purchase a small gift for their birth parent or another significant member of their birth family, such as a sibling who is not living with you.

Other foster families are often a great

source of support. **Ask other families** what has worked for them and what hasn't worked so well.

**It's often helpful to start talking about the holidays sooner rather than later.** Share information with the children in your care about which holidays you celebrate and how your family celebrates them. This will give them an idea of what's to come and can help ease their anxiety. They may like to tell you about their experiences from other homes in which they've lived. Ask if they would like to include any traditions and perhaps you can work as a family to integrate those ideas.

**Consider creating new traditions.** Your whole family could search the internet for fun, new-to-you traditions that can be unique for everyone in the family. Stepping outside of your comfort zone together will help you bond with one another.

Some families choose to **keep their first holiday together low key** to minimize stress. For example, you might consider staying home rather than going to visit extended family. Or you might order delivery or go to a restaurant instead of cooking a holiday meal.

If you choose to visit

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### **Wisconsin Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (WFAPA)**

WFAPA provides great opportunities to get together with other foster parents through its spring and fall conferences. They also have an extensive website, [www.wfapa.org](http://www.wfapa.org), a newsletter and a network of supportive WFAPA members and other foster parents who can be a resource for you.

**The spring conference will take place on April 4 & 5, 2014 at the Wintergreen Resort in Wisconsin Dells.**

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Continued from page 2 extended family, **talk with the children** in your care about who you will see and what they might expect. Let them know if there will be different rules or expectations during family visits.

It's often helpful to **make a plan of action** in the event they feel overwhelmed.

- How will they signal to you that they are feeling overwhelmed?
- What can you do together to calm down?
- Bring familiar toys/blankets to help them feel secure.
- Talk to your family. Let them know about any challenges the children in your care may face when in a new environment or with new people.
- Let your family know how the children address you and each other.
- Ask your family what their expectations are.
- Share some photos of the relatives your children might see or meet. You might even role play a little to help make your children feel more comfortable about an upcoming visit.

With mindful planning and support, you can have a successful holiday season where everyone in your home feels loved and supported.

## Resources

### Coalition Tip Sheets

- Celebrating the Holidays with the Children You Foster
- Planning Ahead: Working Together for Successful Interactions

### Books

- *A Guidebook for Raising Foster Children*, by Susan McNair Blatt, M.D.
- *The Foster Parenting Toolbox*, by EMK Press
- *Success as a Foster Parent*, by the National Foster Parent Association

### Web Resources

- 10 Tips for Getting through the Holidays  
<http://www.fosterclub.com/article/10-tips-holidays>

- Handmade Gifts for Birth Parents  
<http://adoption.about.com/od/celebrationinspiration/a/handmadegifts.htm>
- Helping Young People in Foster Care through the Holidays  
<http://nc.casaforchildren.org/files/public/community/volunteers/HelpYouthInFC-Holidays.pdf>



## DCF Update: Increase in the Foster Care Rate



The Department of Children and Families would like to extend warm holiday wishes to each foster family in Wisconsin. You are a critical component of the child welfare system and each day you give of yourself for the children in your care. May you enjoy time with family and friends this holiday season creating memories.

As approved in the biennial budget, January 1, 2014 will bring an increase to the basic maintenance payment for foster care and they will increase on

January 1, 2015 again. The rates will increase as described below:

The Basic Maintenance Rate is intended to cover food, clothing, housing, basic transportation, personal care, and other expenses on a monthly basis.

### Certified Level One

The Basic Maintenance Rate provided for a child of any age by a foster home that is certified to provide level one care is:

	<u>Jan. 2014</u>	<u>Jan. 2015</u>
<b>Level One</b>	<b>\$226</b>	<b>\$232</b>

### Certified Above Level One

The current age-related Basic Maintenance Rate for a foster home that is certified to provide care at a level of care that is higher than Level One care. The rate for each child is listed below by age group.

<u>Age of Child</u>	<u>Jan. 2014</u>	<u>Jan. 2015</u>
<b>0 – 4</b>	<b>\$375.00</b>	<b>\$384.00</b>
<b>5 – 11</b>	<b>\$410.00</b>	<b>\$420.00</b>
<b>12 – 14</b>	<b>\$466.00</b>	<b>\$478.00</b>
<b>15 – 18</b>	<b>\$487.00</b>	<b>\$499.00</b>

When a foster child in your care turns five, 12, or 15 years of age, you will receive the next highest rate effective the date on which the birthday occurs.

If you have questions on how this impacts current placements you have, please contact your licensing agency.

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