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For Caregivers & Families of Youth in Foster Care *Tips on Family Gatherings & Holiday Seasons*

Holidays can be extremely difficult for children and youth placed in foster care and for their families of origin. During the holidays, children and youth may feel sad or displaced, and may display increased behaviors because of not being in their own home or with their family of origin for the holidays. The following tips are designed to support youth in foster care.

- Whenever possible, it is crucial for children and youth to spend time with their parents and families to feel a sense of **connectedness and belonging**.
- It is also important for children and youth to **celebrate and honor their own beliefs, family traditions, and culture**.
 - In the event that there is no viable option for children or youth to spend time with their families of origin, foster parents should incorporate the child or youth's traditions into their own traditions to create a **welcoming, inclusive environment** at the holidays.

During the holidays foster children and youth can have their **support team to help them during both a joyous and sometimes emotionally challenging time**.

Parents and families are valuable team members along with caseworkers, resource parents, and other caring adults who can collaborate as a team to support children and youth in foster care during the holidays.

When children placed in foster care can be home for the holidays, parents and families should use this time to continue to bond with their children. This can include:

- Playing games together as a family
- Asking questions about school
- Engaging in their favorite activities
- Acknowledging new skills
- Reassuring them that you love them and are working hard to bring them back home.



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If the child or youth cannot spend time with their parents or family, it would be helpful for the parents or family member to share with the foster parent holiday activities that the child or youth enjoy and incorporate these activities into your holiday festivities much as possible. This will give the child or youth a sense of **affirmation, normalcy, and belonging**.

If the child/ youth begin to feel anxious or sad, encourage them to discuss their feelings or write down their emotions.

****You could even encourage them to send holiday cards to their family members or pick out small gifts for the child/youth to share with their loved ones.****

Remember to be **patient, compassionate, loving, and understanding** during these times as it is expected and normal that children and youth will miss their families. As much as possible, make sure the child or youth feel **welcome, equal, and included** in the holiday festivities, and given the option to refrain from participating if they are not ready. Assure them that when they are ready, they can join in at any time.

