



Fostering Across Wisconsin



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Here come the Holidays

Halloween has passed, and the winter holidays are almost upon us; symbols of merriment and good cheer are starting to appear. Many of us have mixed feelings about the holidays. However, for children in foster care, especially those who have recently been placed, these weeks may be full of more challenging feelings and experiences than for other children and families.

Since getting together with extended family and friends is a big part of the season, we have listed some ideas for helping families and children in foster care handle these get-togethers with a little less stress.

- Talk about the season; explain what events you celebrate and why. Describe what your holiday celebrations are like: noisy or quiet, formal or casual, large groups or small. Let the child share about his or her family celebrations and customs.
- Work with the birth family, if appropriate, to have the child spend time with his or her birth family or invite the birth family over for a gathering.
- Try to introduce children to members of your extended family in person before the major holiday gatherings or show them pictures of people they might meet.
- Make sure there are gifts for children in foster care if there is a gift exchange. Some suggestions include: mittens, scarves, earrings, bracelets, fun socks, board games or common toys such as trucks or books. Give your family specific suggestions.
- Go over basic manners such as saying “please” and “thank you.” Explain the expectations of children prior to the celebration. Role-play if you can; it can be fun and instructive.
- Remember: Information about children in foster care and their families is **CONFIDENTIAL**; remind children that they don’t have to talk about their particular situation with others, and let them know that you will be available to change the subject. Remind others that personal information about children in foster care and their birth families cannot be discussed.
- Be prepared for the sadness and grief that children in foster care may experience, and respect their feelings. Talk about their feelings in age appropriate ways, and give them time and space to grieve. Remember that grief takes many forms.

Open discussions and good preparation can make this holiday much more enjoyable for everyone – including you!

Many of these suggestions came from Carrie Craft who writes articles about foster care and adoption for About.com. See this article and others she has authored at:

<http://adoption.about.com/od/fostering/a/fosterholiday.htm>

All of us at the Resource Center wish you a joyful holiday season and a happy New Year. You truly live deeper, love wider, and will leave bigger because of the work you do as foster parents.

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Foster Parents and Birth Parents: Working Together During the Holidays

Holidays and other special events allow foster parents the wonderful opportunity of creating lasting memories and continuing family traditions. However, holidays can stir up mixed feelings and conflicting emotions for children in foster care. Norma Schoenberg, foster and adoptive parent from Fond du Lac, volunteered to share her suggestions on how foster parents can effectively and positively interact with birth parents during the holidays.

- **Develop positive relationships with the birth family.** Communication, consideration, and respect are essential components in promoting and enhancing positive working relationships with birth families. Talk to the children placed in your home and their birth parents about your family traditions and beliefs and theirs to help develop mutual understanding, encourage respect for one another, and further build relationships.
- **Encourage children to make cards and additional phone calls to their birth parents** during the holidays and other special occasions that occur throughout the year. If you participate in gift exchanges, never try to out-perform the birth parents. Remember that sentimental gifts, whether given or received, can be more valuable than any item that was purchased at a store.
- **Give birth families the opportunity of celebrating the holiday with their children first** before their children celebrate with the foster family.
- **Provide the child with a disposable camera** when they visit their family, especially during the holidays. When they return, you can develop the pictures for posting in their Life Book, and they can share special photo memories about times with their birth family.

Thank you, Norma, for sharing your suggestions and ideas with us! If you have ideas or suggestions you would like to share with us regarding the holidays or any other related topic for this newsletter or our website, contact Oriana Carey.

Recommended Resources About Holidays with Foster Children

A Guidebook for Raising Foster Children by Susan McNair Blatt (2000)

This book available for checkout at wifostercareandadoption.org or call Linda Kuzma at 1-800-947-8074.

“7 Ways to Prepare Foster Children for Holiday Get-Togethers.” by Carrie Craft (2006)

<http://adoption.about.com/od/fostering/a/fosterholiday.htm>

“Parents as Partners: How Birth Families and Foster Parents can Work Together.”
Foster Care Support Network (February 2005). For information, email info@FosterCareSupport.net

“How Do You Manage the Holidays?” by Karen LaShaw; Fostering Perspectives; Vol. 2, No. 1 (Fall 1997)

http://ssw.unc.edu/fcrp/fp/fp_vol2no1/how_do_you_manage.htm

“Religious Differences and the Holidays” by John McMahon; Fostering Perspectives; Vol. 2, No. 1 (Fall 1997)

http://ssw.unc.edu/fcrp/fp/fp_vol2no1/religious_differences_holidays.htm

“Expect Weird Responses From Foster Kids Towards The Holidays” by Jo Ann Wentzel. (2006)
<http://library.adoption.com/foster-parenting-and-adoption/expect-weird-responses-from-foster-kids-toward-the-holidays/article/1653/1.html>

“Don’t Forget Gifts of Toys for Teens” by Jo Ann Wentzel.

<http://www.westworld.com/~barbara/jaw2.html>



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NOVEMBER IS ADOPTION MONTH!

We have included the poem below in recognition and celebration of adoption month.

Have You Ever by E. Hoffman

Have you ever opened wide your door,
And met terror eye to eye?
Have you held his trembling body?
Have you rocked him while he cries?
Have you clutched a single garbage bag
That holds everything he owns?
Have you seen his trepidation
As he moves into your home?
Have you ever been a witness
To the toll maltreatment takes.
Not through Sunday papers,
But touched it face to face?
Have you guarded the dark secrets
That little ones dare to share?
Has your heart been crushed and broken
By the demons living there?
Have you tried to answer questions
For which no answers lie?
Have you turned your head and looked away,
So he doesn't see you cry?
Have you fumbled with the band-aid
To heal a heart left bare?
Have you pulled from depths with measure
Some bit of you to share?
Have you heard him tell of siblings,
Whose names he does not know?
Have you listened when he tells you,
"They'll get names when they grow?"
Don't tell me that you understand
Until you do your part,
And carry living cast-a-ways
Forever in your heart.
You ask for a decision,
Does he go or does he stay?
He'll stay in my heart 'til heaven
He moves to some bright day.

Thank you, Esther, for letting us share this poem. If you have any stories or poems you would like to share, please send them to Oriana Carey at ocarey@wiadopt.org or call 1-800-947-8074.

Updates from Oriana

Website: Please continue to visit our website at www.wifostercareandadoption.org regularly as we add more and more helpful resources for families, youth, and staff over the next year. I also want to thank all of you for your patience with our on-line library. We are working to fix the glitches to make the library as user-friendly as possible.

Recruitment: By now many of you have probably seen our new slogan "Live Deeper. Love Wider. Leave Bigger." on billboards across the state. You may have even heard Jessica Doyle championing foster care on Public Radio. We have seen quite an increase in calls from people interested in foster care as a result, which is wonderful. While these ads raise awareness of foster care, experience tells us that the best recruiters are existing foster families. If you know someone who may be interested in fostering, we hope that you will share with them the positive impact fostering has had on your life and family. The Resource Center has information packets we can send out to prospective foster parents, so please have people call us with questions at 1-800-947-8074.

Foster Parent Handbook: Over the past year, the Resource Center has taken the lead on working to develop a model foster parent handbook. We are now in the final phases of completion. After we are done, the handbook will be reviewed by the Division of Children and Family Services and due to be available late Spring 2007.

Outreach: We continue to work on spreading information about our services across the state. Do you want to know more information about the Resource Center? Or do you want to help get the message out



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Focus on 56: Homeschooling

Section HFS 56.09(10)(c) states that, “The foster parent may not provide a home-based private education program to foster children in their care.” In other words, this means that foster parents are not allowed to home-school foster children.

Foster parents – and agencies – may wonder why, if a foster child is having problems in school, they can’t be home-schooled. There are many important reasons why foster children are required to be enrolled in school outside of the foster home.

First, foster children have been through some difficult situations, and some may have even been subject to abuse or neglect for a long time before anyone reported or noticed it. Having foster children in a formal educational environment exposes them to many different people who can help keep them safe and report any concerns they might notice.

Having foster children enrolled in school also exposes them to children their own age and helps them learn valuable social skills to be able to get along with other children. Being formally enrolled in school helps track the educational services foster children receive; it helps maintain consistency in their educational development, especially when they may have moved from school to school.

If you have questions about your foster child’s educational services, contact your licensing or ongoing worker.

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about the Resource Center? Contact me at ocarey@wiadopt.org or 1-800-947-8074 to discuss the type of information you are looking for. We have brochures and information packets available for distribution at events as well as Resource Specialists who will come out and talk with families or staff about the Resource Center.

Thanks to all of you who continue to support our efforts statewide. If you have a question or are looking for information regarding foster care and adoption, give us a call at 1-800-947-8074. If we don’t have the information, we will work with you to try and find the answer.

Foster Parent Support Resources in WI

The Wisconsin Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (WFAPA) works hard to support and advocate for the needs of foster and adoptive families by operating a website with information about the creation of local chapters, publishing a quarterly newsletter, hosting two conferences every year, and working across the state on behalf of issues that are important to foster parents and foster children.

To find out more about WFAPA, visit their website at www.wfapa.org

For more information about other support groups, associations, and resources available in Wisconsin, contact us at wifostercareandadoption.org or 1-800-947-8074. We can provide you with information about the resources closest to you.

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