



Coping with Holiday Stress for Children and Youth in Care

STAR Health



Purpose of Training

During this training, you will learn about:

- Foster Children and Holiday stress
- Helping foster kids during Holidays
- Working with birth families
- Signs of grief or sadness
- Making family get-togethers easier



“Conflicting loyalties and lost dreams often make the holidays a difficult time for children in foster care. Just as studies show that holidays are stressful times for most of us, these reactions are compounded for youth placed in your home.”

Crystal Killion



Helping kids during holidays

- Talk about the season ahead of time
- Help children in foster care imagine what to expect in your home
- Share the religious meanings the holidays may have for your family
- Learn especially about the religious beliefs, customs, and activities of the children you foster
- Try to keep the holidays low key in order to help minimize some of the stress
- Reassure kids if you can, about the safety and care of their birth family
- Expect some conflicting and confusing emotions



Working with birth families during the holidays

- Ask children about their experiences and traditions
- If possible, ask your child's family members about their holiday traditions and customs
- Use this time for the youth in your home to make small gifts and send cards to their birth families or old neighbors and friends



Signs of grief or sadness

- Be prepared for the sadness and grief
- Give your children time and space to grieve
- Grief takes many forms and may be exhibited in lots of ways:
 - Regressing to younger behaviors developmentally
 - Soiling themselves or bedwetting
 - Becoming withdrawn and isolated
 - Having temper tantrums
 - Being rebellious
 - Complaining more than usual



Ways to make family gatherings easier

- Talk about upcoming events and the people who will be there
- Prepare them for the “characters” in your family and also tell them about other children who might be there
- Tell them if your celebrations are quiet or loud, sacred or silly, big or small
- Describe the home or place where the event will be held



Ways to make family gatherings easier

- Give kids a camera so that they can record the celebration
- Be realistic about it
- Make sure you and your family/friends are on the same page regarding gifts



“There is nothing like signing your Christmas cards and including their names so that the person receiving it knows, the card is from 'your entire family.' If they see a stocking hanging just for them, a name tag with their very own name on the table and presents under the tree for them, it will help them feel they belong there.”

Jo Ann Wentzel



Tips for Helping Kids Cope

- Recognize that what the child is feeling is perfectly normal given the situation
- Allow the child to talk about holidays on their terms – avoid the temptation to push them into talking about their feelings or the past, but do not try to avoid it either
- Identify with them. Tell them about a time that you felt as they do
- Get them involved in outside activities
- Find ways to incorporate traditions that the birth family participated in that the child can remember



Resources

- ***Four Adopted Siblings and lots of Stress Joshua Sparrow MD. New York Times 12-31-2010***
- Adoption.com
- Fostering Perspectives Vol. 15, No. 1 November 2010
- American Psychological Association
<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/parents-holiday.aspx>
- Solutions Newsletter Family Services Issue 34.



Thank You!