



# Fostering Across Wisconsin

A publication of the Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center

Vol. 4. No. 4  
Winter 2009/2010



This edition of *Fostering Across Wisconsin* focuses on  
**Holiday Tips**

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The holidays can be a hectic and stressful time for all families, but they can be particularly challenging times for foster families and for youth in care. Holiday celebrations can conjure up an emotional rollercoaster of feelings for youth in care; such as: grief and loss, sadness, excitement, anxiety, insecurities, etc.

Being away from their family or only being able to spend a limited amount of time with them is, in and of itself, a major stressor. Foster parents can be a tremendous asset in supporting youth in care during these potentially difficult and emotionally taxing times of the year.

We asked workers and families for their input on some holiday tips and the following are some of the suggestions we received.

Thanks to Dori Weyenberg, Door County; Crystal Peterson, Teipner Treatment Homes, Amy Plettner, Samaritan Counseling; Courtney Dingfelder, Trempealeau County, and foster and adoptive parents Norma Schoenberg and Jen Bronsdon for the following holiday tips.

- **Volunteer as a family** to serve a meal at a shelter or ring bells for the Salvation Army.
- **Bake and decorate cookies** with your foster children and wrap an assortment in a box to give to birth parents, grandparents, siblings in other homes, etc. Take pictures while making the cookies.
- **Get a special ornament** with the child's first name engraved in it or an ornament that represents the child (i.e. basketball ornament for a child who loves basketball, etc). The child can make a wish and hang the ornament on the Christmas tree.
- **Have enough presents for the kids.** The community is often willing to participate in gifts for kids who need them.
- **Christmas stockings.** If celebrating Christmas, get the children in your care a Christmas stocking

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Holiday Tips, cont. from front

with their name on it. Make sure to send the stockings with them when they leave.

- **Talk with birth parents** to have a gift from them at the foster home under the tree.
- **Have your children in care** pick out one dish that will be served at the holiday meal—something they loved to eat at their parents home or something that they learned to enjoy at the foster home (even if it doesn't go with the normal holiday themed food).
- **Take your kids in care for professional pictures** and give the pictures to the birth parents for Christmas. Or arrange for the whole birth family to go to a setting.
- **Talk to the children** placed in your home and their family about their traditions and beliefs as well as your own traditions and beliefs.
- **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.
- **Remember that sentimental gifts**, whether given or received, can be more valuable than any item that was purchased at a store.
- **Provide the child with a disposable camera** when they visit their family, especially during the holidays. Develop the pictures for posting in their Life Book, and they can share photo memories about times with their birth family.
- **Help your kids in care make a calendar** with pictures and drawings for each month that they can give to their birth family.



## Recommended Resources About Holidays and Kids in Care

Foster Club has several articles at:

<http://www.fosterclub.com/topics/holidays>, including **Getting Through the Holidays**, a guide from FosterClub  
[http://fosterclub.com/files/Holiday\\_youth.pdf](http://fosterclub.com/files/Holiday_youth.pdf)

**7 Ways to Prepare Foster Children for Holiday Get-Togethers.** by Carrie Craft (2006)  
<http://adoption.about.com/od/fostering/a/fosterholiday.htm>

**How Do You Manage the Holidays?** by Karen LaShaw, Fostering Perspectives; Vol. 2, No. 1  
[http://ssw.unc.edu/fcrp/fp/fp\\_vol2no1/how\\_do\\_you\\_manage.htm](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  
[http://ssw.unc.edu/fcrp/fp/fp\\_vol2no1/religious\\_differences\\_holidays.htm](http://ssw.unc.edu/fcrp/fp/fp_vol2no1/religious_differences_holidays.htm)

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

**Don't Forget Gifts of Toys for Teens** by J. Wentzel. <http://westworld.com/~barbara/jaw2.html>

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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.

## What are some of the ways I can help the children who I foster get through the holidays? What are some signs of grief or sadness that I can look for?

- Be prepared for the sadness and grief. Give your children opportunities to talk about their child's feelings throughout the season.
- Give your children time and space to grieve. Grief takes many forms and may be exhibited in lots of ways, including:
  - Reverting back to younger behaviors developmentally.
  - Soiling or bedwetting.
  - Becoming withdrawn and isolated.
  - Having temper tantrums.
  - Being rebellious.
  - Complaining more than usual.
- Try to remember the developmental age of the children you foster. It will also help you to stay patient if you keep in mind the challenges of the season for your child before you react.

While in foster care I was able to go home, but only on Thanksgiving and Christmas day. For me, being with loved ones the whole season is what makes the holidays so special. Going home for just one or two days just wasn't enough.

During the holidays I often felt like an outsider because I was just a foster kid. I struggled emotionally when my foster family celebrated the holidays because I wanted to feel what I thought they were feeling. Even though I was included in all celebrations I often felt left out. To me, I was just "borrowing" their family and ultimately their joy.

Foster parents are put in a tough position during the holidays. They mean well, but sometimes don't understand what their foster kids go through because they've never been in a similar situation themselves. I know my foster mother did her best, but she would have done better had she understood the complexity of my feelings. Still, I will always be grateful for her willingness to open up her home and heart to me.

—excerpted from FosterClub's  
*A Young Alumni's Perspective of the  
Holidays*

by Daniel J. Knapp

<http://www.fosterclub.com/article/a-young-alumnis-perspective-holidays>

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## What are some things we can do to make family get-togethers easier?

- Talk about upcoming events and the people who will be there. If you cannot get together before the big event, introduce your children to family and friends who will be at the celebration by going through pictures.
- 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.
- Be realistic about it—do not make your celebrations seem perfect, but don’t stress the challenges that are part of all family events.

## What can I do to help my children learn what is expected of them at family celebrations?

- This is an opportunity to teach behaviors and manners. Go over basic manners such as “please” and “thank you.”
- Use role playing at home so that they can practice.
- Make sure you and your family/friends are on the same page regarding gifts from and to your children. Perhaps try to have your child bring a small hostess gift to the get together: baked goods,

## Wisconsin Foster and Adoptive Parents’ 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 and network of supportive WFAPA members and other foster parents who can be a resource for you.

**The Spring conference** will be held on March 26-28, 2010 in Waupaca at the Grand Seasons Hotel.

For more information, go to:  
<http://wfapa.org>



nuts, candles, ornament, etc.

- Tell family and friends about your children, and try to introduce them before the holidays. It’s a good time to remind others about the *confidentiality* you honor concerning the children you foster, and it might be a good time to practice some polite but firm answers to some questions.
- Remember especially to ask your children what they might want shared or not shared.

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