

NEWS NOVEMBER 2016

FROM YOUR PEER LIAISON



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**I UNDERSTAND...
I AM A FOSTER PARENT TOO**

IFAPA recognizes that foster parents often need the perspective of peers during the foster parenting and adoption experience.

I can provide support and assist you with questions regarding:

- Licensing requirements
- Training needs
- Respite care
- Behavior challenges
- Working with birth families
- Confidentiality issues
- And much more!



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How can we work with birth families during the holidays?

- Ask children about their experiences and try to incorporate some of their traditions. The children placed in your home may miss some activities that they experienced with their family or in a previous placement.
- If possible, ask your child's family members about their holiday traditions and customs. Ask about their beliefs and observances. Although you may feel stretched at the holidays, try to coordinate schedules with the birth families. This gives the children a chance to share what is familiar while experiencing new traditions.
- This is a good time for the youth in your home to make small gifts and send cards to their birth families or old neighbors and friends.
- This is a time when many children feel conflicted feelings about their birth families and worry about them. It is a good time to let the young person know that it is okay for them to be safe and cared for even if their family struggles. Reassure them if you can, about the safety and care of their birth family.

<http://fosteringperspectives.org/fpv15n1/holidays.htm>

Religious Differences & the Holidays

The holidays can be tough for foster families. Children in care miss their families and their traditions, while at the same time they may want to be part of the activities of the foster family. When there's a religious difference between the child's family and the foster family, things can become even more complicated.

Religion can be a sensitive issue. Legally, birth parents have the right to choose their children's religion or lack of religion. Placement of their child in foster care does not take away this right.

Of course, most foster parents try to respect the culture and religious customs of the children in their care. But what does this mean when it comes to religion?

The answer lies in establishing open lines of communication among foster parents, DHS, and the birth family. If your agency knows how you feel about religious issues (for example, if prayer makes you feel uncomfortable, or if you feel compelled to convert children and their families), it will make informed placement decisions. If you haven't already done so, consider talking with your social worker about how religion affects your role as a foster parent.

This communication works both ways. The more you know about the religion, traditions, and preferences of birth families, the easier it will be for you to act in a way that honors their beliefs.

NEWS FROM YOUR IFAPA PEER LIAISON

How to Survive the Holidays with Foster/Adoptive/Relative Placements

My husband and I have been fostering for 21 years. The holidays can be a very stressful time when you are dealing with children in out of home care. Some children have big triggers that come up during the holidays, and some children aren't used to the way you and your family deal with the holidays. Some families don't know exactly how to handle this time of year with gift giving and festivities. Some of the things that you choose to do will be a personal preference, but there are a number of things that you should do no matter what.

1. Treat the children in your home as any child in your home. Treat them like they are part of your family, because they are. Like your own children, get them gifts that represent their interests. If you get a placement right before Christmas, please find a way to provide them with some items to open along with everyone else. If you need to, check with local charities for help in obtaining gifts and ask your family and friends to help if need be. Most people really want to help during this time of year.
2. Remember that you are GIVING them gifts. What this means is, if they leave your home, they should be able to take these gifts with them.
3. Santa—whether or not you celebrate Santa, it is important that you figure out if your foster child does or not. If they do they may be worried that Santa will not be able to find them since they aren't at home. Have them write Santa a letter to let him know where they are. Some kids may not have ever had Santa come. It is not your place to tell the child that Santa is make believe. This is something that should come from their birth family. Remember, the goal is to have them return home and it will be important that they return home with their belief intact. If you feel it is necessary to tell them anything, please confer with the birth parents first.
4. Communicate with the birth family about visits during the holidays. Make sure if you have travel plans that you include planning for visits as well. If you have out of state travel plans, remember that you must get prior approval before traveling out of state with foster children.
5. Plan something to do during the break from school. When you have things planned, even if you don't end up doing all of them, it helps everyone not feel so bored. Have the kids help plan things to do. This will be a good opportunity to find out from them what they have done in the past and how you can incorporate some of their traditions. Keep in mind, this could also cause some triggers. Here is a list of some of the things you can do:
 - Make cookies or cupcakes
 - Make a craft, maybe even something they can give to their family members
 - Watch holiday movies
 - Go Christmas shopping
 - Go sledding
 - Build a snowman
 - Go to a play or community event
 - Go see Santa
 - Invite friends over and have a Christmas party

Easy Turkey Pinecone Craft for Kids



- ❖ Cut a small diamond out of yellow construction paper and fold in half to create the beak.
- ❖ Cut a wattle (rectangle with a heart shape at one end) out of red construction paper.
- ❖ Glue beak, wattle and google eyes to pinecone.
- ❖ Twist dark pipe cleaner around pinecone base and poke into orange.
- ❖ Glue fall leaves to opposite side of orange to create tail feathers. (Or trace your child's hand on two different color sheets of construction paper. Cut out and glue them together, overlapping.)
- ❖ Glue two acorn caps to bottom for feet.

