Between Families Newsletter 2023

Foster Care and the Holidays

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The holidays can be a difficult time for many children in foster care. Foster children are faced with the realization that they will not be with their biological family members for the holiday. Let’s look at some reasons a child may be struggling during this time.

To begin, a child in foster care may be struggling with the want to remain loyal to their birth parents. There are those moments when a child from foster care may feel guilty for experiencing joy and laughter with their foster family, they may feel they are not only letting their birth mother or father down, they might even be betraying their birth parents and members of their biological family, causing even more grief, guilt, and anxiety within the child during this season of holiday joy.

Another consideration for a child in your home during this time, is whether they are familiar with your customs, or how you celebrate that holiday. Perhaps the holiday being celebrated in your home is one that their birth family never celebrated.

Lastly, the holidays are a time when families come together in sometimes larger numbers. A foster child may become overwhelmed by the number of new people they are meeting or may feel like they do not belong.

So the question raises, what can we do to help the foster children in our home? To begin with, foster parents can best help their foster child by spending some time talking about the holiday. Let the foster child know how your family celebrates the holiday, what traditions your family celebrate, and include the child in it. Ask your foster child about some of the traditions that their family had and try to include some of them into your own home during the holiday. This will help them not only feel more comfortable in your own home during this time, but also remind them that they are important, and that his birth family is important as well.

More than likely, your foster child will have feelings of sadness and grief, as he is separated from his own family during this time of family celebration. However much you provide for him, however much love you give to him, you are still not his family. Like so many children in foster care, they want to go home, to live with their family members, despite the abuse and trauma they may have suffered from them, and despite all that you can and do offer and provide for him. Therefore, this time of holiday joy is especially difficult. You can help him by allowing him to talk about his feelings during the holidays. Ask him how he is doing, and recognize that he may not be happy, nor enjoy this special time. Look for signs of depression, sadness, and other emotions related to these. Allow him space to privately grieve, if he needs to, and be prepared if he reverts back to some behavior difficulties he had when he first arrived into your home. You may find that he becomes upset, rebellious, or complains a lot. Along with this, he may simply act younger than he is during this time. After all, he is trying to cope with not being with his own family during this time when families get together. These feelings and these actions are normal, and should be expected. You can also help your foster child by sending some cards and/or small gifts and presents to their own parents and birth family members. A card or small gift to his family members can provide hope and healing for both child and parent, and help spread some of the holiday cheer that is supposed to be shared with all.

Each family has that some particularly “crazy” members. Your family is used to these relatives and their personalities, your child in foster care is not. If you have family members visit your home, prepare your foster child for this beforehand. Let him know that the normal routine in your home may become a little “crazy” during this time, that it may become loud, and describe some of the “characters” from your own family that may be coming over to visit. Remind him of the importance of using good behavior and manners throughout this period. Along with this, remind your own family members that your foster child is a member of your family, and should be treated as such. Remind them that he is to be treated as a member of the family, and not to judge him or his biological family members, or fire questions at him. This also includes gift giving. If your own children should be receiving gifts from some of your family members, your foster child should, as well. Otherwise, your foster child is going to feel left out, and his sadness and grief will only increase. Be prepared, though, for some in your family not to have presents and gifts for him. Have some extra ones already wrapped, and hidden away somewhere, ready to be brought out, just in case. With a little preparation beforehand from you, this season of joy can be a wonderful time for your foster child, one that may last in his memory for a life time, as well as in your memory, too.

1. Foster children may struggle with the holidays because they want to remain \_\_\_\_\_ to their birth family.
   1. True
   2. Loyal
   3. Firm
   4. Respectful
2. What are some of the feelings a foster child might be feeling during this time. (Circle all that apply)
   1. Grief
   2. relief
   3. Guilt
   4. Anxiety
3. A child in foster care may become overwhelmed by the number of new people they meet.
   1. True
   2. False
4. It is always easy for a foster child to feel like they belong in their new family.
   1. True
   2. False
5. What are some of the things you can do to help your foster child?
   1. Spend time talking about the holiday
   2. Let your foster child know how your family celebrates the holiday
   3. Include some of the foster child’s traditions into your celebration.
   4. Allow foster child to express feelings
   5. All of the above
6. Many children in foster care want to go home despite the abuse and trauma they may have suffered.
   1. True
   2. False
7. What should you allow a child who may be experiencing grief and sadness?
   1. Hugs
   2. Space
   3. Motivation to join
8. How should you prepare a foster child for “crazy” family members? (circle all that apply)
   1. Let them know normal routine may be different.
   2. Prepare for potential increase of volume
   3. Discuss appropriate behaviors they need to follow.
   4. Don’t prepare your family for the foster child to allow them to feel normalcy.
   5. Ensure foster child is treated the same as any other child in the family, which includes providing gifts.
9. Your extended family should fire questions at the biological child in order to get to know them and their past.
   1. True
   2. False
10. Having a foster child into your home can bring extra joy and introduce your family to new traditions and cultures.
    1. True
    2. False

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