

## TOPIC:

### Navigating the Holidays with Youth in Custody

*December 2018*

Micro Training Course Developed

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#### INSTRUCTIONS FOR FOSTER PARENT TRAINING CREDIT:

*\*Read through this self-study*

*\*Fill out the "CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING" Questionnaire*

*\*Return to ACRF for 1.0 hour of training credit.*

Foster families have a unique family culture that flexes when a new household member joins the mix. The holidays are a great time to take a look at your current family traditions and explore new or different ways of celebrating to support the children in your care. We have a list of things to consider with regard to how your family culture navigates the holiday season. These talking points are intended to spur conversation and planning about how your family traditions may support or differ for your foster youth and ultimately provide a safe and connected holiday season for everyone.

- ✓ Talk to the birth parent and child about what holiday celebrations look like for them. Who is present, what time of day do the festivities start, who is responsible for food items, etc. Evaluate how these situations may be the same or different from how your family does things. Where can you incorporate some of the child's experience into your home?
- ✓ Discuss the family contact plan and expectations with your child's caseworker, the birth parent, and the child (when appropriate). How will you navigate say, a Christmas day visit with siblings in another foster home if that is when your family celebrates the holiday? Or working with a birth parent's work schedule and Christmas Eve for family time?
- ✓ If you have a good relationship with the youth's birth family, consider inviting them to your home for a special holiday dinner or arrange to meet at a restaurant. This can help the young people in your home see that you respect their relationship with their birth family and help them not have to pick between spending time with their parents or with your family for holiday festivities.
- ✓ Tend to your youth's spiritual and religious needs and beliefs. Ask him or her what is needed need to practice their beliefs during the holiday and seek out those resources or supports if they differ from your family. Example: asking someone from the same faith background to support your youth in attending a service or ceremony.
- ✓ Holidays often mean very busy schedules. If your family is participating in a community event, a spiritual event at your church, etc. consider including the birth parent and/or the child's siblings to increase the opportunities of family contact during the holidays.
- ✓ Consider reaching out to the child's extended family as well. Check with your child's caseworker and the child's birth parent for names and contact information for important family members like grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles. Sending a card or a phone call can help a child check in with extended family members.
- ✓ Talk with your family in advance of holiday celebrations. Remember confidentiality of the child in your care, but it should not be a surprise for extended family to arrive at your home (or if you are

traveling to theirs) and see a new face. Let your family know to respect the youth's privacy and not ask prodding questions like "what happened to you?" or "why are you here?"

- ✓ Help the child purchase or make holiday gifts for their siblings, parents, and other important people in his or her lives (such as teachers, coaches, or mentors).
- ✓ Be available to support the youth in your home. While your family may be excited and happy, the holidays may bring a sense of loneliness and fear for a youth that his family won't be whole again. It's not a foster parent's job to "cheer up" the youth, but provide support and empathy.
- ✓ Respect if the youth does not want to participate in all outings, celebrations, or other activities during this time. Brainstorm with your youth alternate activities so that his or her needs are still being met.
- ✓ If you're still in contact with a youth who was previously placed in your home, remember to reach out to him or her! A phone call, a card, or even a "drop by if you can" invite can mean the world to a young person.
- ✓ Prepare and talk with the youth in your home about what the holidays look like at your house. With time off school and work, how will the normal routine be disrupted? If there will be gatherings at the home or in the community, when will they happen, who will be there, and what should the youth expect to happen at those gatherings? Provide as much consistency and preparation for any changes as possible to the normal routine.
- ✓ We also have to consider that some families do not celebrate some holidays. If a child's family of origin does not celebrate a holiday (or your family does not celebrate a holiday that the child's family does) have an open conversation with the child's team and birth parents early on. Your family's values, as well as the child's, are important and deserve to be respected. Be creative in navigating these differences. Can you lean on a friend from the same background as the child to assist during activities and celebrations? Will the OCS caseworker allow the child to have extended family contact time with their birth parents or in the foster home of their separately placed siblings so they can practice their holiday traditions?

Happy Holidays to all our Resource Parents, their families, and the children and families they are supporting!

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To Earn 1.0 Hour Foster Parent Training Credit (Alaska Foster Parents Only) COMPLETE [QUESTIONNAIRE](#)

# Navigating the Holidays with Youth in Custody

6 pts Possible, 1.0 Hour Training Credit

1. Give two examples of how you can support the youth in your home during the holidays.  
Any two reasonable answers will be accepted.
  - 1.
  - 2.
  
2. The study suggests talking to \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_ about the family contact plan during the upcoming holidays.
  
3. It's a good idea to prepare family and friends about a foster youth attending your holiday celebrations.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
4. Which of the following was NOT suggested by the self-study (CHOOSE ONE):
  - a. Reach out to youth who were previously in your home if you're still in contact.
  - b. Help youth purchase or make gifts for their siblings, parents, and other important people in their lives.
  - c. Set up a bank account to help youth purchase gifts for family members.
  - d. Consider inviting birth parents and siblings to community events you are planning to attend.

**FOR SCORING AND TRAINING CREDIT OF 1.0 HOURS, RETURN THIS QUESTIONNAIRE TO:**

**Alaska Center for Resource Families  
815 Second Avenue Suite 202  
Fairbanks, AK 99701**

**OR FAX TO: 907-479-9666 or scan to [acrf@nwresource.org](mailto:acrf@nwresource.org)**