

## Adoption



## Foster Care

*The mission of Children's Aid Society is to identify and provide services to improve the lives of children and their families.*

**Post-Permanency newsletter**  
**Winter 2018**

# Holidays with an adopted child

*By Leslie Culpepper*  
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For many parents, the holidays are always stressful. The heightened expectations, financial stress and packed schedules that most parents experience around the holidays can make this time of year as difficult as it is wonderful. Now consider the impact this additional stress is likely having on your adopted child, who is probably experiencing loss and grief, reliving vivid memories or asking hard-to-answer questions. The holidays with an adopted child can be full of hurdles. As a parent of an adopted child, you must learn to help your child and help yourself through this very stressful time.

### Managing Troubling Behaviors

This time of year is emotionally charged, and your child is probably experiencing a slew of hard feelings. Guilt, anxiety, despair, anger, loss. Old memories may be coming to the surface, triggered by the smells, sounds and tastes of the holidays. Take the time to understand what your child is going through. All adopted children experience the holidays differently. Children who spent many years with their birth family and many years in foster care may have happy or sad memories of birth families and old traditions left behind. Internationally adopted children are likely to feel disconnected from their cultural roots, and may have many questions about their birth culture.

Those children from open adoptions can experience stress and conflicting feelings about their birth parents and adopted parents. And finally, children who know little or nothing about their birth parents may spend more time reflecting on the birth families they have no memories of. Be observant during this time. Take notice of mood swings, subtle expressions and body language.

Try to understand what your child is going through by initiating discussions. Say things like, "you seem sad," or "you seem frustrated," and invite your child to discuss the problem openly. Point out your observations in a non-judgmental way. This will help validate your child's feelings. If your child is having a hard time grappling with these emotions, make or purchase a blank book where your child can record intense feelings in a way that is private and non-destructive. If your child has a Life Book, take it down off the shelf and look it over together. Talk about the memories, and explore the undesirable thoughts that have been coming to the surface. To keep the both of you from going crazy, give yourself permission to let the little things slide. Don't try to discipline every single wrong behavior that comes up; only tackle the big things. Forgive your child, and forgive yourself at the end of every day.



### Maintaining and Creating Traditions

If your child is the product of an open adoption and you have a functional relationship with your child's birth parents, it is important to nurture this relationship at the holidays. Maybe you'll start a gift-

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## Coming up ...

Children's Aid Society offers free support groups for adoptive and foster parents to meet other families who share similar joys and concerns.

The program is held the third Monday of each month at 223 Virginia St., Clearfield. Each session includes a light dinner, free child care, and training hours. To sign up, call 765-2686 x204 or email [adoption@childaid.org](mailto:adoption@childaid.org).

#### *Upcoming program dates and topics:*

January 21: Internet Predator Safety

February 18: Relationship Building Tips (with your spouse or significant other)

March 18: Building Children's Self Esteem

April 15: Trauma-Informed Care

May 20: Summer Safety

June 17: Summer Picnic

## Holidays (from Page 1)

exchange tradition, or an annual winter holiday brunch at your child's favorite restaurant. This will help your child feel like he or she is a part of a stable, healthy family unit. Never subvert the relationship between your child and his or her biological family. When a schedule is made for a visit, stick to it. Avoid any stressful situations by keeping the lines of communication with your child's birth parents open. For an internationally adopted child, learn the practices of his or her cultural origins. Integrate these cultural traditions into your family traditions, because these cultural roots are now connected to your own family and this should be acknowledged. Make traditional foods, celebrate special holidays and talk about the origins of these holidays with members of your family. Similar advice could be given to families of adopted foster children. Former foster children may have strong personal memories of old times with their birth family, or previous foster families. These roots should not be lost or forgotten but rather brought into the open, and celebrated when possible. Your adopted children should be taught that their memories of the holidays are okay to have. To strengthen your personal bond with your child, develop some new family traditions together. This will help your child dismiss feelings of being an outsider in a family where traditions may already have been established long ago. For example, create a new holiday ornament, as a family, every

year. Light a candle for the joys and sadnesses you and your child may be feeling at the holidays, and discuss both openly. Watch your favorite holiday movies together in a "holiday movie night," and make popcorn balls and cookies for the occasion.

### Avoiding Problems

Be sensitive to the way your extended family treats your adopted child at family functions. This is especially important in blended families with biological and adopted children. No one wants to think that their extended family treats their adopted children differently, but watch out for behaviors from extended family that may make your adopted child feel isolated from your biological children. If you notice problems, address the issues with your child and with your extended family members. If your child says something to you acknowledging the problem, explain that not all people respond to adoption in the same way. This may be hard for your child to hear, and harder for you to say, but covering or denying the issue won't make it go away. By acknowledging the problem, you show your child that you understand their feelings and that you can face the problem together. Talk to your extended family about these problems. Be firm and stand up for the rights of your child. It helps if you can build up to the holidays gradually.



Start talking about holiday plans and traditions early to avoid unexpected problems. Make your holiday plans clear, so that your child knows what to expect. If you can avoid it, stick to your regular daily routines, and don't change plans at the last minute. This is especially important if your child struggles with hyperactivity or anxiety. For a child who is new in your family, practice giving and receiving gifts. This is important because expectations may have been different in your child's previous homes. This way you can avoid embarrassing or aggravating situations, and your child will know what to expect. Finally, don't chase the perfect holiday. Keep a sense of humor and be realistic. The holidays with an adopted child can be an enriching experience that ultimately strengthens your family bond, but you must remember to keep a level head and dismiss unrealistic expectations. Remind yourself every day that you and your child can find happiness, even as you experience bumps along the way.

## SWAN Post-Permanency Services



**statewide  
adoption and  
permanency  
network**

*These services are available to any family who has adopted and lives in Pennsylvania, whether or not they adopted their child from foster care, and to those families who have provided permanency to children from the foster care system through permanent legal guardianship or formal kinship care.*

*Families self-refer by calling the SWAN Helpline (800-585-SWAN) to request these services. The services are part of a continuum of services that strengthen and support families and assist in strengthening the special needs adoption community at the local level.*



*Use your smartphone to  
access our website*

# Save the dates!

## MARRIED RETREATS

JANUARY 25 & 26:  
120 PUB & GRUB EVENT CENTER  
RED ROOF INN, CLEARFIELD

FEBRUARY 15 & 16:  
DUBOIS COUNTRY CLUB RESORT  
(814) 765-2686  
REALRELATIONSHIPS@CHILDAID.ORG



Real Relationships



Funding for this project was provided by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Grant: 90FM0104-01-00. These services are available to all eligible persons, regardless of race, gender, age, disability, or religion.



# SUPER BOWL 2019

(Previously known as "Bowl for Kids' Sake")

APRIL 13, 2019 CLEARFIELD LANES

CONTACT: 765-2686 X239 OR MENTORING@CHILDAID.ORG

## Are most days a battle from breakfast to bedtime?

Triple P — Positive Parenting Program can help!

Free, private, in-home sessions will teach you how to adapt your own behavior to get the results you want from your child.

Available in Clearfield and Jefferson counties!



To sign up or for more information ,  
call 814-765-2686 x206  
or email [ppp@childaid.org](mailto:ppp@childaid.org)

Paid for with Pennsylvania taxpayer dollars.



# FAMILY FUN ...

## Christmas ornaments from sticks and twigs

(from [easypeasyandfun.com](http://easypeasyandfun.com))

You'll need:

- craft popsicle sticks
- twigs and branches
- white school glue
- scissors
- yarn
- sequins or other decorations

You can start with a lovely walk in the nature collecting all kinds of twigs. If the twigs aren't dry, dry them first (you can dry them at a low temperature in the oven).

Break up the twigs to get different lengths, use scissors when you can.

Apply a generous amount of glue along 3/4 of popsicle stick. Start gluing on the broken down twigs starting with the smallest on the top, adding larger ones till bottom. Let it dry completely.

Glue on yarn on the back side if you wish to hang this popsicle stick tree ornament.

You can leave them as they are or take it a step further and decorate with sequin, pom-poms or anything else that will make these popsicle stick and twigs Christmas tree ornaments look even more festive.

More ideas from nature ...

Recently trimmed a tree? Paint Santa faces on the smooth ends then use a ribbon to tie all three logs together to create adorable decor to sit by your front door.

(from [smartgirlsdiy.com](http://smartgirlsdiy.com))

