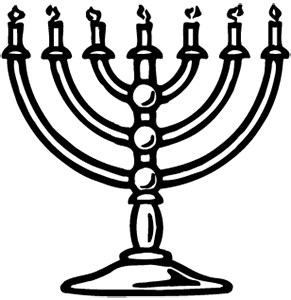
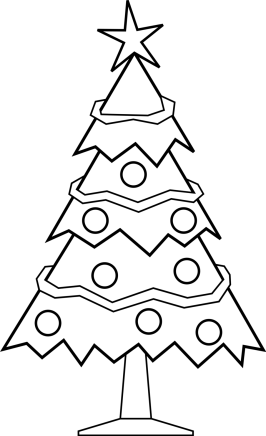
The Holidays and Foster Care

Challenges:

1. Hard emotions
   1. Loneliness
   2. Depression
   3. Outsider
   4. Charity case
   5. Sadness
   6. Guilt
2. Missing what is lost
   1. Reminder that the family is separated
   2. Traditions
   3. Connectedness with extended family
   4. The opportunity to make memories together
   5. Worry for siblings and parents who might be alone
3. Give them space to grieve

How CASA Can Help:

1. Talk to resource parents about preparing the child for the holiday:

Have a discussion about family’s holiday customs. Knowing what to expect will help to decrease anxiety around the holidays. Avoid surprises and you will decrease seasonal tensions.

1. Remind resource parents to prepare friends and family before they visit:

Surprising a host or hostess at the door with a “new” child may make things awkward, making the child feel like an imposition right from the start. Preparing friends and family should help cut down on awkward, but reasonable questions such as “who are you?” or “where did you come from?”

1. Help resource families plan for confidentiality:

Resource families may receive well intended but prying questions from those they visit with over the holidays. These questions are generally not meant to be insensitive or rude, but simply come from a place of not knowing much about foster care. If they need it, help them prepare in advance about how to answer these questions while maintaining the child’s confidentiality.

1. Submit a wish list:

Make sure to submit a “wish list” for gifts for your CASA child. We try to ensure balance in gifts, so we have extras to help offset a larger number of gifts that siblings or other children in the foster home may receive at the same time. Children often keep count of the number of gifts received (right or wrong) and use it to compare with other kids, so quantity is important.

1. Facilitate visits with loved ones:

When in court, you can advocate for family visits during the holidays. Try to get permission for your CASA child(ren) to make phone calls to loved ones if visits are not feasible. Be sure to start your advocacy VERY early as you likely won’t be back in court for at least three months.

1. Help them make sure their loved ones are okay:

Young people may worry that their family members are struggling through the holidays, including their siblings. Knowing that a biological parent or sibling is okay may ease a young person’s mind through the always emotional holidays.

7. Understand and encourage your youth’s own traditions and beliefs:

Encourage discussion about the holiday traditions your CASA child experienced prior to being in foster care, or even celebrations they liked while living with other foster families. Encourage the resource parent to incorporate the traditions the youth cherishes into their own family celebration, if possible.

8. Assist the child(ren) in making holiday gifts or in sending cards to their family and friends:

You can help kids craft homemade gifts for their parents and siblings or help them send holiday cards (note: check with your caseworker first to ensure that this is okay). Be sure to take precautions to ensure safety (for example, use the address of the DCPP office as the return address) and that you are in compliance with any court orders.

9. Understand if they pull away:

Despite your best efforts, your CASA child may simply withdraw during the holidays. Understand that this detachment most likely is not intended to be an insult or a reflection of how they feel about you, but rather is their own coping mechanism.

10. Donate gift cards for older youth:

The holidays can be a particularly tough time for young people who commonly struggle financially and have more sophisticated needs. Gift cards are a great gift to help them bridge that gap. You can help by donating gift cards to CASA for the kids throughout the year.

Visit <http://nc.casaforchildren.org/files/public/community/volunteers/HelpYouthInFC-Holidays.pdf> for more information.