



INDEPENDENT LIVING

Franklin County DSS

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10 Tips for Getting Through the Holidays (www.fosterclub.com)

1. **stay connected to family and friends.** Purchase or make cards to send out to family and friends during the holidays. It is a great time to create or update your address book. Be respectful of a foster family's privacy and check with them to see if you should place the return address of their house on the envelope or if you should use an alternative, like the address to the foster care agency (some people may have concerns about the safety of the home if too many people have the address). Make phone calls to friends from an old neighborhood or to previous foster families. (Get your family's OK first).

2. **Speak up for visits.** Let your foster parents and a case-worker know how important visits are to you during the holidays. Do what you can to help arrange the visits, by being flexible with your schedule or helping to make the arrangements with those you wish to visit. Understand that the holidays can be a busy time for everyone, so you may need to "remind" foster parents frequently

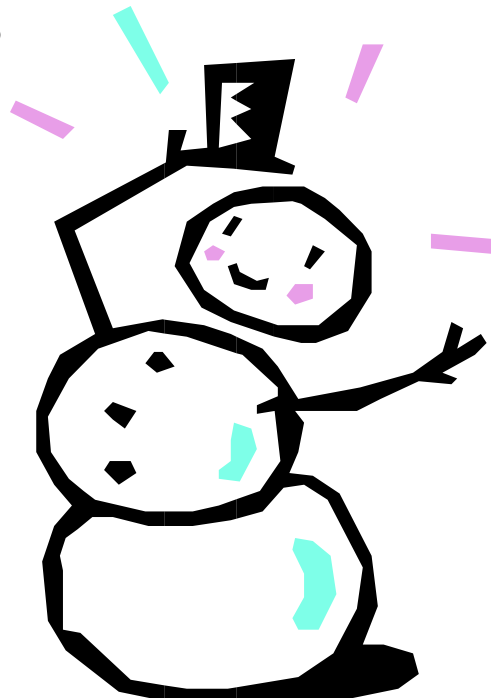
to do what it takes to get a visit arranged. If they need a little help understanding where you are coming from, give them a copy of this publication to back you up! (remember that your worker and the Judge have the final say on whether or not visits happen and make sure to give plenty of time for visits to be arranged!)

3. **Let 'em wag'.** If you're feeling a little lonesome and if you're a dog lover, you're in a category with lots of other people who

adore pets. Throughout the holidays, your Humane Society may need help in adopting out animals. During this rewarding work you can walk and bathe dogs, teach them new tricks, and help them find good homes. Some shelters hold photo sessions as fundraisers so pet owners can have their dog or cat pose with Santa. Check with your local shelter or pet store to see if they might be hosting a fundraiser of this kind and how you can assist them.

4. **Connect at church.** If you belong to a church, check into all the holiday activities that might be going on and join in! Activities around the holidays might include social gatherings, caroling (singing around the neighborhood), volunteer efforts, and extra services. If you do not belong to a church but have been thinking about joining one, the holidays can be a fun time to get acquainted with a church or churches in your community.

5. **Write on.** If you like to write, keep a daily journal for the holiday season. Use your writing as a way to vent feelings, work through anxiety and worries, and to reflect on the true meaning of the



Speak up for yourself now and all throughout the year!

Special points of interest:

- *Upcoming IL Classes:*
 January 26th 11-2 – Taxes
 February 23rd 11-2 – FAFSA
 March 22nd 11-2 – Cooking
 April 19th 11-2 – Recreation
 May 17th 11-2 – Lifebooks
- *YAC for January is only open to members*

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Holidays. Some find it helpful to write "letters", even if they will never be sent, to loved ones you are missing or who have passed away. If you are inclined, you can send your stories to info@fosterclub.com.

6. Be yourself. Chances are you'll naturally be meeting and running into lots of people during the holiday season. The simplest things can connect you to someone, and one of the easiest places to get started is by being yourself and showing kindness. Compliments always make people feel special and recognized. Start by noticing something unusual or unique about the person. Admire a piece of their jewelry, or shoes they're wearing, or their impressive vocabulary. By pointing out something remarkable and singular, you can easily start up a conversation or make a new friend.

7. Lend a hand. Volunteering can unite people with similar values. Offer to help the Salvation Army with their Christmas dinner for needy people. Hold reading sessions for kids at your local library or bookstore where you can read their favorite holiday stories to them. If you're uncertain where to start, ask your foster parent, case-worker or a neighbor to help you research the possibilities (who knows—they may even join you!).

8. You'll make it. Every-

one appreciates a homemade gift. Consider making holiday ornaments, knitting scarves, or crafting bookmarks. Search the internet for ideas and instructions about making inexpensive holiday crafts. Most everyone loves homemade cookies or candies wrapped in pretty boxes. And in case you can't think of anyone in the whole world who would love your delicious and yummy homemade cookies, FosterClub's address is 753 First Avenue, Seaside, OR 97138. =)

9. Visit others who may feel alone. Older people in a retirement or nursing home may be away from loved ones during the holidays. Check with the home or a local hospital to find out if there are people who would enjoy having company during the holidays. Consider bringing a favorite holiday story to read aloud or load your iPod with a favorite Christmas song (you may have to explain



Try Volunteering This Holiday Season!

how you got the song in there!).

10. Connect at FosterClub.com. Be sure to visit the FosterClub message boards at www.fosterclub.com and connect with your peers who may be feeling the winter blues or struggling with the holidays. Post your feedback to an article written by a FosterClub AllStar at www.fosterclub.com/topcis/kidsLikeMe.cfm. Let us know how you spend the holidays and give your own ideas about how to find your own peace during the holiday season.

Check out www.fosterclub.com

DSS Christmas Gifts

Why didn't I get an iPod or an Xbox 360? Well, it's simple. The gifts that you get from DSS are not from DSS at all. They are from community donations. People in the community or at local churches either take a name off of an angel tree or they call the agency and request to sponsor a foster child for Christmas. They then get a copy of your list and buy things that are appropriate for their budget.

When DSS says to be reasonable, they

mean it. There is no way that you will get an Xbox 360 from donations made to DSS. Don't be disappointed when you don't find it in your DSS gifts this Christmas. Next year think of reasonable things. Picture yourself as an adult and think about what you think you'll be able to buy for a child that you have never and will never meet. Is an Xbox 360 on



Consider writing a thank you note for your sponsor this year!

that list? Probably not unless you are really rich. More reasonable gifts are CD's, clothes, gift cards, bath items, household items, etc.

Does that make more sense now? If it wasn't for these sponsors you wouldn't get gifts from DSS!



A Young Alumni's Perspective of the Holidays (www.fosterclub.com)

I love the holiday season! I start listening to Christmas music a few weeks before trick-or-treaters scout their neighborhoods for candy in their Halloween garb. Some say I'm crazy for listening to Christmas music so early, but I don't think a month is long enough to thoroughly enjoy those great holiday tunes.

For me, the meaning behind the holidays is more than stuffing your face with Grandma's homemade pecan pie, getting the year's hottest toy, or even enjoying the music. What it's all about is coming together as a family and enjoying and treasuring each other's company.

As a foster kid I used to hate the holidays because I wasn't with my family. After my father died the holidays never seemed the same. While in foster care I was able to go home, but only on Thanksgiving and Christmas day. For me, being with loved ones the whole season is what makes the holidays so special. Going home for just one or two days just wasn't enough.

During the holidays I often felt like an outsider because I was just a foster kid. I struggled emotionally when my foster family celebrated the holidays because I wanted to feel what I thought they were feeling. Even though I was included in all celebrations I often felt left out. To me, I was just "borrowing" their family and ultimately their joy.

I felt guilty when my foster mother bought me gifts because I knew she didn't have to. Sometimes I felt the only reason she bought them was because she was obligated to. If she bought gifts for me I felt guilty, and if I didn't receive



Don't miss out on what the holiday season is really about!

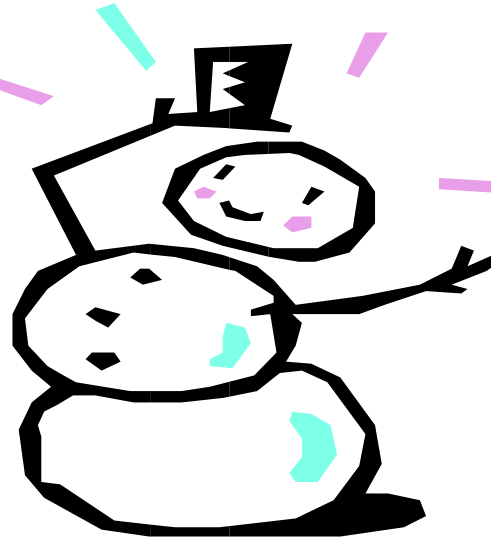
gifts I would have felt unloved. It was a no-win situation.

Foster parents are put in a tough position during the holidays. They mean well, but sometimes don't understand what their foster kids go through because they've never been in a similar situation themselves. I know my foster mother did her best, but she would have

done better had she understood the complexity of my feelings. Still, I will always be grateful for her willingness to open up her home and heart to me.

In my town we have an organization that provides toys for needy kids to open on Christmas morning. Though the presents were un-wrapped and came in a clear plastic bag, I really enjoyed receiving them. Since the donor of the toys were anonymous, I felt I didn't owe anybody. Receiving the plastic gift bag was a clear indicator that I was needy, but I'd rather feel needy than obligated to someone.

I'm sure my story is probably different than yours, but I know what it's like to be a foster kid during the holidays. I know what it's like to miss bio-family. I know what it's like to feel awkward observing the holidays with people who



What do you have planned for the holidays?

have different customs and spiritual beliefs than you do. I know it's really hard spending the holiday season away from the ones you love, but I encourage you to not push away from the ones who are caring for you, even though the situation may only be temporary. They might not say or do the right things all the time, but remember that they do their best.

I can't control my foster care history and I can't control other people's behavior, but I can control how I react

to life's circumstances. During the holiday seasons past I missed out on so much because I was focused on issues that were really out of my control. I had every right to feel those feelings, but it cause me to miss out on what the holidays are really about. I still struggle with some of those feelings today that I felt when I was younger and in foster care, but I don't let them rob me from enjoying the holidays.

"I felt guilty when my foster mother bought me gifts because I knew she didn't have to."

I wish you joy and peace this holiday season,

Daniel J. Knapp

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g/independent_living.htm](http://www.franklincountyva.org/independent_living.htm)



No-chill Cutout Sugar Cookies

This is a nice sugar cookie which doesn't require that you chill the dough before you roll it out. We recommend you roll it out between two sheets of waxed paper to prevent sticking.

Makes about 24

1 cup butter, softened
1 cup granulated sugar
1 large egg
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
2 teaspoons baking powder
3 cups all-purpose flour

Preheat oven to 375°F. In a large bowl, cream butter and sugar with an electric mixer. Beat in eggs and vanilla. Add baking powder and flour one cup at a time, mixing after each addition. Dough will be stiff. Do not chill dough. Divide dough in half. Roll each half about 1/8 inch thick. Dip cutters into flour before each use. Bake cookies on ungreased cookie sheet on middle rack of oven for 8-12 minutes, or until cookies are lightly browned.

<http://www.christmas-cookies.com>

Holiday Definitions

(www.webster.com and en.wikipedia.org)

Christmas: a Christian feast on December 25 that commemorates the birth of Christ and is usually observed as a legal holiday.

Advent: the period beginning four Sundays before Christmas and observed by some Christians as a season of prayer and fasting, the coming of Christ at the Incarnation.

Nativity: is the story of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth.

Hanukah, Hanukkah, Chanukah: an 8-day Jewish holiday beginning on the 25th of Kislev and commemorating the redirection of the Temple of Jerusalem after its defilement by Antiochus of Syria.

Dreidel: a 4-sided toy marked with Hebrew letters and spun like a top in a game of chance, a children's game of chance played especially at Hanukkah with a dreidel.

Menorah: a candelabra with seven or nine candles that is used in Jewish worship.

Kwanzaa: an African-American cultural

festival held from December 26 to January 1.

Christmas Tree: a usually evergreen tree decorated at Christmas.

Santa Claus: a plump white-bearded and red-suited old man in modern folklore who delivers presents to good children at Christmastime—called also Santa.

Atheist: one who believes that there is no deity.



What holiday terms apply to you?