

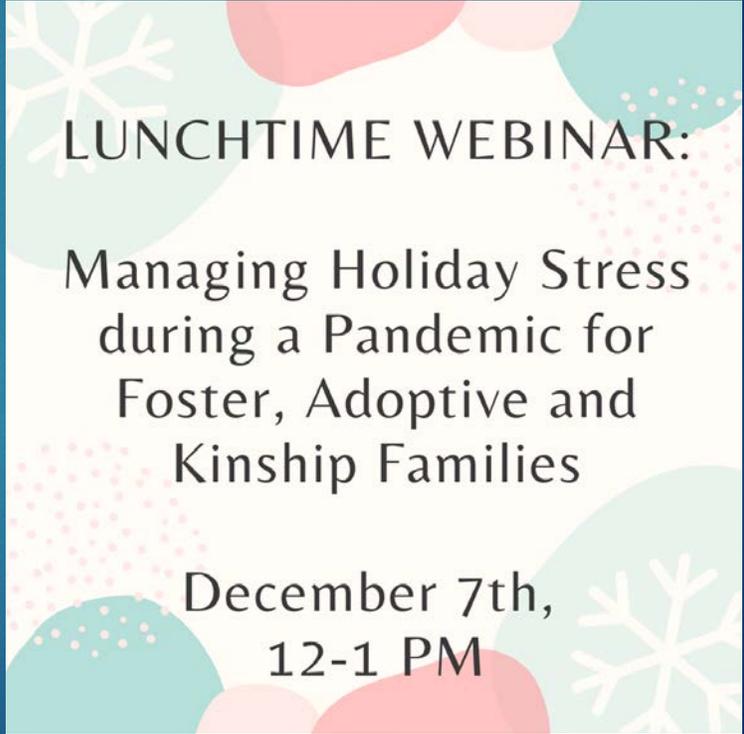
Managing Holiday Stress During a Pandemic for Foster, Adoptive and Kinship Families

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FORMED FAMILIES FORWARD



LUNCHTIME WEBINAR:

Managing Holiday Stress
during a Pandemic for
Foster, Adoptive and
Kinship Families

December 7th,
12-1 PM

Who we are...

www.FormedFamiliesForward.org

- ▶ Formed Families Forward, a family-led resource center in No Va
- ▶ Provide training and direct support to foster, adoptive and kinship families who are raising children and youth with special educational needs, and professionals who work with our families.
- ▶ We offer free training, *Stronger Together* peer support groups, consultations to families, events, resources, classes, and systems navigation. ACE Interface trainers; member of Prince William TICN.
- ▶ Family partner to Virginia Tiered Systems of Supports (VTSS)

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Learning Intentions

- ▶ Examine why holidays during “normal” times were already challenging for many foster, kinship and adoptive families
- ▶ Discuss the additional complications and stressors the pandemic adds to our families during the holiday season
- ▶ Provide suggestions on how parents and caregivers can help children and teens cope with the sense of loss this holiday season
- ▶ Identify strategies for caregivers to promote resilience in children and teens by building strong relationships

Poll – How was the Stress Level in your Family surrounding Thanksgiving?

- ▶ Very stressful
- ▶ Somewhat stressful
- ▶ Not stressful at all



Feelings of Loss Pre-pandemic

- ▶ Children missed adults, siblings, relatives, neighbors, teachers and other important people in their lives
- ▶ Children may live in homes with different religious and cultural customs
- ▶ Children miss their own family traditions and sense of familiarity
- ▶ Children miss familiar holiday foods
- ▶ Children may not receive presents, may get less presents than other family members or are too afraid to ask for what they really want

Common Holiday Behaviors Pre-pandemic

- ▶ Reverting to younger behaviors developmentally
- ▶ Soiling themselves or bedwetting
- ▶ Becoming withdrawn and isolated
- ▶ Having temper tantrums
- ▶ Becoming rebellious
- ▶ Complaining more than usual
- ▶ Needing to be extra busy to avoid feeling

This Year will be Extra Challenging

- ▶ Social distancing regulations and travel restrictions will make it harder to have in person visits with familiar family and friends
- ▶ Still many unknowns: Loss of structure and predictability can be hard for children with special needs or trauma histories
- ▶ Disappointment over traditions they look forward with their new families to must be canceled
- ▶ Lack of access to technology may make virtual visits difficult
- ▶ Limited ability to interact with anyone other than immediate family due to local and state COVID-19 regulations may be isolating

Pandemic-related challenges, continued

- ▶ Children may not have the opportunity to meet new family members in person
- ▶ Worry about the health and safety of family members
- ▶ A long winter break from school during which caregivers could be working
- ▶ Internationally adopted children from less wealthy countries may worry about access to medical care for sick family members

Needs Behind Behaviors

- ▶ Need is what drives a behavior. A need is what makes a behavior functional for the child (though behavior itself can be undesirable & harmful).
- ▶ Do not take behaviors that seem like rejection personally when trying to create a positive holiday experience.
- ▶ Children and teens often do not tell us directly what they need. **They behave. Look behind their behavior to understand their needs.**
- ▶ Services to address behaviors are often ineffective because they are not designed to meet the need behind the behavior for that individual.
- ▶ A prescriptive, standard response to 'misbehavior' often fails to address the need. Respond to the need, not the behavior.

Share!

- ▶ Type into the Questions pod your specific holiday-time challenges or concerns.



Caregivers can Promote Resiliency

- ▶ Resiliency is defined as the ability to thrive, adapt and cope despite tough and stressful times.
- ▶ Caregivers promote resiliency by providing the following:
 - A sense of safety (physical and emotional)
 - Information
 - Healthy coping skills
 - Hope and optimism
 - A sense of connection, supportive relationship
 - Making children feel *safe, capable, and lovable*.

Resiliency, continued

- ▶ Give accurate information; allow space, time and supports for processing difficult information
- ▶ Encourage them to share their emotions and remain nonjudgmental
- ▶ Prepare children for the holidays in your home, ask them to share their traditions and incorporate those traditions
- ▶ Give them developmentally appropriate opportunities to create new traditions
- ▶ Brainstorm create ways to include important people in the celebrations
- ▶ Remember that while school aged children and teens normally enjoy winter break, this year they may miss the socialization

Relationship is Critical

- The number one protective factor in a child's life is: the presence of a stable adult figure; a close, positive bond with at least one adult in a caring role.
- Relationship is the foundation of RESILIENCY



Strategies for Building Strong Relationship

Create **predictable structure**, and stick to it. Routines are VERY helpful.

Be aware of your own **physical presence**, tone of voice, volume, body language, etc. Consider carefully use of physical touch and maintain an even tone of voice and neutral body language.

Dedicate one block of time per day to **child-directed activity** in which you are fully engaged.

Make transitions to new activities or spaces **calm and predictable**.

Poll

A first step that you will try this holiday season to support your family:

- ▶ Share information with children in my care
- ▶ Focus on relationship
- ▶ Increase predictable routines
- ▶ Identify new traditions



Discussion time!

- ▶ Chat your question or comment in.
- ▶ We will call on you and unmute you if possible.
- ▶ **Winter holiday family game night (virtual) on Dec. 18!**

- ▶ Remember to Like us on Facebook-
<https://www.facebook.com/FormedFamiliesForward> and follow us on Insta and Twitter
- ▶ Please complete the BRIEF evaluation at end. Recording of this and previous webinars are under Resources tab and then Webinars on **FormedFamiliesForward.org**