



— From our family to yours —

# HAPPY HOLIDAYS

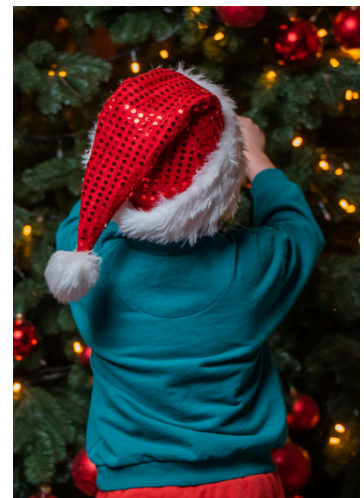
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For kinship care homes, holidays can be particularly challenging, as children may experience conflicting emotions due to being separated from their biological family. Potential feelings of guilt about living with relatives instead of their parents, and the reminder of their disrupted family situation, often leading to sadness, anxiety, and behavioral issues during the festive season.

Kinship caregivers can serve these precious ones more fully and respectfully when we take the time to understand the unique struggles that holidays present for them. Please enjoy this edition for tips to help you along the way.

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# Hectic Holidays: Handling the Hassles

Written By Emily Jo Peterson

The holidays are a busy time of the year. Even if you do not celebrate any holiday, November and December is usually full of a lot of events and traditions! It is very common to see a change in your child's behavior during this time of year. Do not panic; it is normal for children to struggle through the holidays alongside adults. As a parental figure, you can try the following strategies to help provide a safe and loving space during this busy time of the year.

1. **Keep your routines!** Children thrive on routines; they are successful when things are predictable. All children benefit from routines. Children with disabilities or who have trauma thrive with routines because they can help regulate behaviors. Keeping the routines helps kids know they are safe and loved. While it is tempting to change up the routine during the holidays, keep your routines consistent so children have predictability.
2. **Consistent High Expectations for Behaviors.** It is common to see new behaviors (or old behaviors) return during the holiday season. Children sometimes are aware of why they are acting out and sometimes they are not able to express why they are upset because they do not have the capacity to explain yet. Keep your expectations the same; high but not impossible to meet. React from a position of power; speak calmly and articulate. Carry out consistent consequences that are a direct result of the behavior. For example, if a child walks into the home with dirty shoes and gets some snow or dirt on the floor, a consequence could be for that child to clean (or help depending on the age) up the mess. Save punishments for more severe behaviors; be prepared to carry those out if needed. When children see the expectations are the same throughout the year, this provides them with the security of consistency.
3. **Be selective.** There are a lot of fun events around the holiday season and there is a lot of pressure to attend them all (and post about it on social media.) Instead, select a few events to participate in. Families can decide together which events to participate in or it may only be an adult decision. When attending special events, let go of the routine for the day, pick back up the following day. Too many events can overwhelm anyone and can make special events feel like a chore.
4. **Communication.** Spend time talking to your family on how they are during the holiday season. Normalize checking in even if you think things are "going well." Children mask their behaviors and as adults we want to make sure they have a soft space to land. During these discussions, make sure there are no distractions (i.e. Turn off the TV, put devices away). Use the information you gather to help decide what's best for the family. If your child is acting out, wait until they and you have had time to process, and heads are cool.
5. **Get Outside.** I know exactly what you are thinking; it is cold out there! However, spending some time outside each day has been proven to help with mental health and overall happiness. Even if it's only 15 minutes, the fresh air, the sun (if you can get any) will have a positive effect on you and your family. Children who do not get any sun or air tend to act out. (Ask any classroom teacher what it is like to teach children who have not had outdoor recess.) Get your child moving outside to help them decompress, self-regulate and be ready for the next thing!





*fun things to do during the holidays*

# HOLIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

*We hope your holidays are filled with laughter & love.*



**Fantasy in Lights at Olin Park, Madison:** November 9th-December 31st, free to the public. Drive through Olin Park and look at the holiday decorations! Turn your radio on to synchronize with the holiday lights or check out the soundtrack on their website as you drive through the display. (<https://fantasyinlights.com/>). The lights are on from dusk until dawn each day! Stop by the park for a Candy Cane between 4:30 and 10 PM!

**Zoo Lights at Henry Vilas Zoo, Madison:** November 29th- December 29th on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays (some select weeknights, too). Tickets are 10.00, and children under the age of 3 are free! Walk around the zoo and check out the light displays! Ride the carousel an unlimited number of times! Santa will visit each night for your family to take photos with!

**Rotary in Lights, Waunakee:** From November 24th to December 31st, enjoy a free light display in Waunakee's Village Park. You can walk or drive the display, making it more fun for the whole family!

**Lake Ripley Park Holiday Lights, Cambridge:** Enjoy an accessible half mile of holiday lights and displays in downtown Cambridge! Runs from November 30th-January 1st

**Train Rides with Old Saint Nick, North Freedom:** Enjoy a 55-minute train ride a la 1900s style! Receive a visit from Santa, too! Tickets for sale online.

**Theatre Performances:** For younger children (ages 8+ is recommended), check out "A Christmas Carol." Themes are learning about compassion, transformation, and redemption through the Children's Theatre. Check out "The Nutcracker" performances at the Madison Overture Center for older children.

**Musical Performances:** Madison Overture has several free performances for children during its Winter Season. These are free 45-minute events aimed at children!

- December 7th: Stuart Stotts
- December 7th Free Community Carol Sing-Along
- December 14th: The Handphibians
- January 4th: David Landau

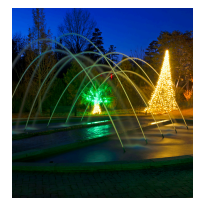
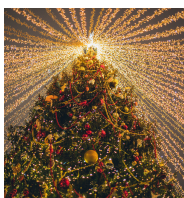


**Holiday Carolers:** Check out volunteer singers along State Street! Dates: December 7th, 14th, and 21st from 11 am-3 pm.

**Madison Ice Inc, Skating, Madison:** Did you ever want to go ice skating but couldn't because you did not have rentals? Madison Ice Inc. has you covered! For a small cover charge and rental fee, you can skate during public skate hours with the whole family! Public skate times vary but can be found on their website at <https://www.madisoniceinc.com/publicskate>

**Madison Parks Systems, Madison:** Various parks throughout Madison offer free ice skating rinks and places to hike, cross-country ski, and sled! Take a look at the following links for more information:

- **Ice Skating Locations:** <https://www.cityofmadison.com/parks/iceskating>
- **Snowshoeing** (Rentals at Elver and Vilas Park) <https://www.cityofmadison.com/parks/snowshoeing>
- **Sledding** (Rentals at Elver): <https://www.cityofmadison.com/parks/sleddinghill>
- **Sledding at Lake Park, Madison:** Who can forget the infamous large sledding hill near Lake Park over on Northport Drive? Slide down and then say hello to the kinship staff!



# 11 Holidays the World Celebrates in December

While December may be synonymous with the arrival of Christmas for many, it includes other major cultural and religious holidays around the world as well, such as celebrating Buddha's enlightenment; commemorating an apparition of the Virgin Mary; and honoring African-American heritage.

## St. Nicholas Day (Dec. 5 or 6)

- Also known as the Feast of Saint Nicholas, Christians honor the birthday of Saint Nicholas—the inspiration behind Santa Claus, given his proclivity towards gift-giving.

## Immaculate Conception Day (Dec. 8)

- Catholics celebrate the day of Immaculate Conception to honor the Virgin Mary, who is believed to have been born without original sin. The day is often celebrated by going to church and feasting.

## Bodhi Day (Dec. 8)

- A High Holy Day, full of remembrance and meditation. Also known as Rohatsu, this Buddhist tradition honors the day in which the Buddha—Siddhartha Gautama—is said to have achieved enlightenment. Many Buddhists celebrate it through meditation.

## Feast Day of Our Lady Guadalupe (Dec. 12)

- Mexicans and Mexican-Americans often celebrate the feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the patron saint of Mexico who symbolizes patriotism and devotion. Millions of pilgrims typically visit the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in December to celebrate the festival, which marks one of several apparitions of the Virgin Mary that some Catholic believers say was witnessed by an Indigenous Mexican man in 1531. The Virgin Mary's face is abundant in Mexico—in homes, shops and shrines.

## Hanukkah / Chanukah (Dec. 18-26)

- The Jewish holiday of Hanukkah begins Dec. 18. It is an 8-day celebration of the rededication of the Temple of Jerusalem. A central part of the Jewish Festival of Lights entails the lighting of a nine-branched menorah each night. (The ninth candle is used to light the others.) The ritual symbolizes how one day's worth of oil miraculously lasted for 8 days during a battle between a small group of Jewish people and the powerful Greek-Syrian army in 165 B.C. Per Jewish tradition, they are said to have emerged victorious and reclaimed the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. Customary foods include latkes (potato pancakes), sufganiyot (jam-filled donuts) and brisket. Children often play with a dreidel (a spinning top with Hebrew letters).

## Yule (Dec. 21-Jan.1)

- Wiccans and Neo-Pagans celebrate the winter solstice (the darkest day of the year, on Dec. 21) through the festival of Yule. The winter solstice marks the shortest day and longest night of the year; Yule celebrates the re-emergence of the sun and the days beginning to grow longer again. The festival was first celebrated in Scandinavia as a Norse festival. A common tradition is burning the yule log, which originally was done to celebrate the sun's return. It has since also been folded into a Christmas tradition. In fact, Yule became associated with Christmas in the 9th century, some still stick to the original Yule celebrations.

## Christmas (Dec. 25-Jan. 11)

- Christians celebrate Christmas to celebrate the birthday of Jesus. Christians celebrate Christmas Eve/Day with exchanging gifts and the arrival of the birth of Jesus Christ in the nativity. The following weeks consists of masses in celebration of the Holy Family (Feast of the Holy Family), Mother Mary (The Feast of the Solemnity of Mary) and the arrival of the Three Kings (Magi). Catholics acknowledge the season (Epiphany) is concluded the Sunday following Epiphany with the celebration of the Baptism of the Lord. During the holiday season, it is also normal to exchange gifts, gather as family and celebrate Santa Claus.

## Boxing Day (Dec. 26)

- A British tradition that occurs the day after Christmas and dates back to the 1800s when Queen Victoria ruled the throne. At the time, it was a day to ensure that upper class Britons gave servants and workers a day off, in addition to giving them a present. The holiday has since evolved into a more commercial occasion for gift-giving.

## Kwanzaa (Dec. 26-Jan. 1)

- The week-long holiday of Kwanzaa honors African-American heritage; it's a cultural holiday as opposed to a religious one. Black nationalist Maulana Karenga created Kwanzaa in 1966 as a way to unite the African-American community following the Watts Rebellion in a predominantly Black Los Angeles neighborhood. Karenga laid out seven key principles for Kwanzaa: unity; self-determination; collective responsibility; cooperative economics; purpose; creativity; and faith. Its name comes from the Swahili phrase "matunda ya kwanza," which translates to "first fruits." Kwanzaa celebrations draw from African musical and storytelling traditions.

## Zarathosht Diso (Dec. 26)

- Founded by the Prophet Zoroaster more than 3,000 years ago, Zoroastrianism is one of the world's oldest monotheistic religions. Zoroastrians honor the death of their prophet on this day, typically by visiting a fire temple and offering prayers.

## New Year's Eve (Dec. 31)

- The day every new year is met with anticipation around the world, as revelers party, set off fireworks, set resolutions and countdown to midnight to welcome in new beginnings. In many post-Soviet countries, the holiday is celebrated with traditions similar to Christmas, such as the arrival of gifts from "Grandfather Frost."





## Holiday Transitions for Children:

# NAVIGATING CHANGE WITH CARE

Written By Kelsey Schroeder-Gasser

*As the holiday season approaches, it's a time of joy, celebration, and, for many children, significant transitions. For those in out of home care or kinship care, these changes can be particularly profound. It's essential to recognize how the holidays can impact children's mental health and how caregivers can support them during this time.*

## The Impact of Holidays on Children's Mental Health

Holidays often come with high expectations, which can lead to emotional stress. For children, especially those who have experienced instability, the season can trigger a range of feelings:

- **Anticipatory Anxiety:** Children may feel anxious about changes in routine, spending time with unfamiliar family members, or experiencing new traditions.
- **Loss and Grief:** For many, holidays can highlight feelings of loss, whether related to family separation, the absence of loved ones, or memories of past celebrations.
- **Pressure to Conform:** Social media and societal expectations can create pressure to have a "perfect" holiday experience, leading to feelings of inadequacy or isolation for those whose experiences differ.
- **Behavioral Challenges:** Increased stress can manifest as behavioral issues. Children might display heightened emotions, withdrawal, or acting out as they process their feelings.

## Parenting Tips for Caregivers

1. **Open Communication:** Encourage children to express their feelings about the holidays. Create a safe space for them to share their thoughts, whether they're excited or apprehensive. Validate their emotions and reassure them that it's okay to feel mixed feelings.
2. **Establish Routines:** Consistency can provide comfort. Establish daily routines that incorporate holiday activities, such as decorating, baking, or creating crafts. Predictability helps children feel secure during a time of change.
3. **Involve Them in Planning:** Give children a say in how they want to celebrate. This could include choosing decorations, selecting holiday movies, or planning meals. Involvement fosters a sense of control and belonging.
4. **Mind Cultural Sensitivity:** Recognize that not all children celebrate the same holidays. Be inclusive and respectful of their backgrounds and incorporate diverse traditions where possible.
5. **Create New Traditions:** While it's important to honor existing traditions, consider creating new ones that suit your family dynamic. This can help children feel a sense of belonging in their current environment.
6. **Be Patient with Changes:** Understand that transitions may lead to increased anxiety or behavioral challenges. Patience and empathy are crucial. Offer support and understanding, reminding them that change is a part of life and that you're there to walk through that change with them.
7. **Seek Support:** Don't hesitate to reach out for help, whether from fellow caregivers, support groups, or professionals. Connecting with others who understand the unique challenges of out of home and kinship care can provide valuable insights and encouragement.
8. **Focus on Self-Care:** Caregivers often bear a heavy emotional load, especially during the holidays. Prioritize self-care by carving out time for yourself. A well-rested and emotionally balanced caregiver can better support the children in their care.

*The holiday season can be a whirlwind of emotions and transitions, particularly for children in out of home and kinship care. By fostering open communication, establishing routines, and creating inclusive traditions, caregivers can help mitigate the mental health impacts that the holidays may bring. Remember, the goal is not perfection but connection—building relationships and memories that will last long after the holidays have passed. Wishing you all a warm and supportive holiday season!*



## Diffusing Bedtime Power Struggles

We've all been there - we're doing our best to move through the bedtime routine and we are met with near constant resistance. Every single step feels like trudging through the mud. And then, we hit that one triggering step that your child just can't easily move through, and the stalemate begins.

When this happens to me, I try to follow five steps to get us moving again toward our goal of a calm, connected bedtime:

- **Connect first.** Validate the struggle. State what your child is wishing and hold the boundary. This might look like, "You wish you could read more books. It's hard to stop reading because it's so much fun. We'll read more books tomorrow."
- **Co-regulate!** If you and your child are both coming into this interaction at a level 10 emotionally, it will not end well for either of you. Take the time to breathe together and do your best to de-escalate together before moving on.
- **Offer a choice that empowers the child and moves you toward the goal.** For example, "Would you like the bubble gum or fruit punch toothpaste tonight?" This gives your child a sense of control in a situation where they are struggling. Be sure the choice continues moving you toward your goal!
- **Compliment Their Capability:** Start with the phrase, "I see you..." and state what you see. For example, "I see you following directions and brushing those teeth so well. Way to go!"
- **Choose your battles!** At the end of the day, remember that toddlers and preschoolers are constantly playing a game of tug-of-war between autonomy and dependence. This dance will cause age-appropriate tantrums, power struggles, and defiance. Remember that this is all normal and expected behavior! And won't last forever!





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*Looking forward to seeing you  
in the New Year,*

**YOUR KINHSIP TEAM**