

Happy Holidays

from our family to yours

DECEMBER 2025 ISSUE



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NAVIGATING THE SEASON TOGETHER

Insights & resources to help kinship families create warmth, stability, and celebrate bright moments

For many kinship care families, the holiday season brings a mix of emotions. Children may hold both the joy of being with relatives and the tender feelings that come with missing their parents or navigating changes in their family story. These emotions can show up in many ways, and that's completely normal.

As kinship caregivers, your compassion, patience, and presence create a safe space for children to feel all of those feelings while still experiencing the warmth and connection the season can offer. By understanding the unique dynamics the holidays can bring, you're better able to support them with empathy and confidence.

We hope you enjoy this edition, filled with helpful tips and encouragement to guide you through the weeks ahead. Your care makes an incredible difference.

CAREGIVER SUPPORTS



HOW TO COPE WITH GRIEF DURING THE HOLIDAYS

The holidays can be an especially tender time for children and caregivers in kinship care. For many children, this season highlights losses they may be carrying — being away from parents, siblings, familiar traditions, or the home they once knew. At the same time, kinship care parents may be experiencing their own grief, whether from saying goodbye to a child who has transitioned, holding concern for a child’s family, or navigating the emotional weight that comes with caring deeply.

Children often express grief differently than adults. Some may act out, withdraw, or show increased anxiety during the holidays, while others may seem unaffected one moment and overwhelmed the next. These reactions are normal. Providing reassurance, maintaining routines when possible, and allowing space for feelings — without pressure to “be happy” — can help children feel safe and understood.

Kinship Families may also experience a unique kind of loss during the holidays. Caring for a child who has experienced trauma can stir deep empathy, sadness, or reminders of past goodbyes. It’s important for caregivers to acknowledge their own feelings, even while supporting a child. Grief does not take away from the meaningful work being done — it reflects the depth of care involved.

The holidays can be an opportunity to honor both loss and connection. This might mean creating new traditions that feel manageable, acknowledging absent loved ones in gentle ways, or allowing quiet moments alongside celebration. For some families, less structure or fewer expectations may be the most supportive choice.

Connection matters. Reaching out to friends and family, or support professionals, can ease the sense of isolation that grief often brings. Sharing experiences — especially during the holidays — can be a powerful reminder that no one is navigating this alone.

Above all, give yourself and the children in your care grace. Grief may look different from day to day, and that’s okay. Offering presence, patience, and compassion — to children and to yourself — can be one of the most meaningful gifts this season.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES



WAY FORWARD

CREATING FOOD SECURITY & HOUSING STABILITY

WayForward Resources

Provides access to nutritious food for people throughout Dane County and support that helps people stay in their homes in Middleton, Cross Plains, and parts of west Madison.

- Website: <https://www.wayforwardresources.org/>

Wisconsin Family Connections Center

Ongoing Virtual Support Groups

Kids Matter Inc

Provides assistance to foster and kinship families, including legal help (guardianship, school/healthcare access), trauma-informed support, and a “Fostering Healing” program for families caring for children with trauma.

More info:

<https://www.kidsmatterinc.org/financial-help/kinship/kinship-resources>



ONGOING VIRTUAL SUPPORT GROUPS

Dates and times of groups are subject to change. Check the calendar of events on the Wisconsin Family Connections Center website for the most accurate schedule for each group.

| | |
|--|---|
|  ADULT ADOPTEES This group is open to adult adoptees. Topics alternate between open discussion and structured facilitated discussion. This group meets on the second Wednesday of each month at 7:00 PM. |  BIRTH PARENT SUPPORT Open to any birth parents who have had a child placed for adoption, no matter what type of adoption or agency involved. This group meets on the second Tuesday of odd months at 6:30 PM. |
|  ONLINE BOOK CLUB Join us as we read through and discuss a book together (with relevance to out-of-home care or adoption). Check online for the current book selection. Days and times of group meetings will vary. |  REUNIFIED PARENTS Designed for parents who have recently reunified, or are in the process of reunifying (transitioning to reunification within the next month). This group meets monthly on a Wednesday at 7:00 PM. |
|  OPEN MIC TEEN SUPPORT Designed for teens in foster, adoptive, reunified, kinship, and/or guardianship families to socially connect and discuss topics related to family dynamics. This group typically meets on the second Tuesday of the month at 7:00 PM. |  TRAUMA INFORMED PARENTING Designed for Wisconsin foster, adoptive, reunified, kinship, and guardianship caregivers with a high level of need due to complex trauma histories. This group meets on the third Monday of each month at noon. |
|  KINNECT RELATIVE CAREGIVERS OF CHILDREN Designed for grandparents, uncles/aunts, siblings, or other relatives acting as the primary caregiver for children. This group meets on the last Thursday of every month at 11:00 AM. |  REGISTER TODAY! Registration is required to attend any group. Scan the QR code to visit our Eventbrite Collection of Virtual Support Groups and register today! |

LOOKING FOR HOLIDAY FUN? HERE ARE SOME GREAT LOCAL PLACES TO VISIT WITH YOUR FAMILY!

Fantasy in Lights at Olin Park, Madison: November 15th–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 the lights 4:30 – 10PM!



Zoo Lights at Henry Vilas Zoo, Madison: November 22nd– December 23rd on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays (some select weeknights, too). Tickets are 12.00 for general admission, with children ages 3 and under free. On December 10th, there is a Sensory Friendly Night for those who need less stimuli. Visit their online site to purchase tickets! <https://www.henryvilaszoo.gov/home/lights/>



Rotary in Lights, Waunakee: From November 23rd to December 31st, enjoy a free lights display in Waunakee's Village Park. You can walk or drive the display, making it more fun for the whole family!

Ripley Park Holiday Lights, Cambridge: Enjoy an accessible half-mile of holiday lights and displays in downtown Cambridge! Runs from November 30th–January 1st between the hours of 5–10 PM.



Children's Theatre Performances

Check out tickets here: <https://ctmtheater.org/see-a-show/2025-26-season/>

- *The Pigeon Gets a Bit Holiday Extravaganza*, The Starlight at MYArts
- *A Christmas Carol*, Dec 6–21st, Capital Theatre at Overture ..and many more great shows into 2026!
- *Winter Fantasia Reimagined*; December 4th–December 7th, Madison Overture Center
- *The Nutcracker*; December 12–21st at Madison Overture Center, Madison Ballet brings this magical performance to life. Recommended for ages 8+



Madison Public Library Events

The Madison Public Library has programs for all ages and not all programs require a library card. Highlights include “*Children’s International Story Hour*,” “*After School Art with Amy*,” “*Fake Cake Bakery*,” “*Storytime Readalouds*,” “*Puzzlepaloosa*,” and many more! Check out the Madison Public Library Event page (search by library and filter it down to age groups for a more concise search). www.madisonpubliclibrary.org/spaces/events



MORE FUN LOCAL SPOTS TO ENJOY WITH YOUR FAMILY THIS HOLIDAY SEASON!

Free Shows on the Rotunda Stage at Madison Overture. Shows are approximately 45 minutes. Some offer livestream options or ASL interpretation. See <https://www.overture.org/calendar/> for more information about tickets.



- **Fox and Branch's Will Branch,** December 20th. This lively duo brings families together with a high-energy mix of traditional and original songs played on guitar, fiddle, banjo, and washboard. They will get you excited to sing, dance, and laugh!
- **David Landau,** January 10th. David's performances are upbeat musical programs that keep children engaged and constantly thinking. The kids sing some, move some, dance some, shout just a little bit, and laugh a bunch.

Children's Museum Events;

Check out the Children's Museum Events for a wide variety of fun and interactive programs for children to attend! Highlights include *Music Time with Tim*, *Braaaains!* With UW Neuroscience Outreach, *Messy Art* with Laurie, *Aventuras en Español*, Clay Day,

Children's Museum Free Nights:

- Thursday, January 1st, 4:00–8:00 PM

Winter Break Activities at the Children's Museum:

- Friday, December 19th, 26th, and January 2nd Clay Day 1–3 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 (6.00 for adults, 4.00 for kids) 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>

Explore Children's Museum, Sun Prairie: Play has many benefits for young bodies and minds, and these benefits are only enhanced when caregivers participate in a child's activities. Children of all ages learn through play and providing a place where they are able to take risks and be creative helps to boost confidence and create lifelong learners.

- **Noon Year's Eve Event.** Wednesday 12/31/25 @ 11:00am. More info at: <https://www.exploreecm.org/>

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 Out-of-Home Care staff!



7 STRATEGIES TO HELP GRANDPARENTS THRIVE



I'M A GRANDPARENT RAISING MY GRANDCHILD. WHERE DO I FIT?

Raising a grandchild is one of the most selfless and loving choices a grandparent can make. Yet for many, it can also feel isolating and overwhelming. In a world where most parents are in their 20s, 30s, or 40s, grandparents raising grandchildren may feel out of place. Their peers are preparing for retirement, traveling, or enjoying slower-paced lives, while they are packing lunches, helping with homework, managing school meetings, and figuring out TikTok and classroom apps. Where do they fit in parenting spaces?

FEELING OUT OF PLACE

It's not just about your age! So much of the culture around you is different than when you were raising your children. Schools have changed. Technology is changing rapidly. Childhood itself looks different from what it did a generation ago. For grandparents taking on this new responsibility, the learning curve can be steep, and the emotional toll significant.

Many grandparents first notice the difference at school events, on the playground, or at the pediatrician's office. The other adults are often decades younger. Conversations at drop-off or school pick-up might revolve around unfamiliar topics. Some grandparents feel judged or left out. Others simply feel invisible.

This sense of being "out of sync" with your grandchild's circles can be deeply discouraging. Add in the physical demands of parenting at an older age, like lower energy, chronic health issues, or simply needing more rest, and the journey can feel even heavier.

HOW CAN GRANDPARENT-LED FAMILIES THRIVE?

1. Connect with others in the same role.

Grandparent caregiver support groups can offer connection, encouragement, and practical advice.

2. Reach out to the school.

The teachers, counselors, and administrators in your school district can be powerful allies.

3. Ask about available resources.

Many communities offer services specifically designed for kinship caregivers.

4. Set realistic expectations for yourself.

It's okay to pace your energy, take breaks, and say no.

5. Commit yourself to keep learning.

Embracing technology and school changes can be overwhelming. But learning in small steps is possible.

6. Create routines that work for the whole family.

Kids who have experienced loss, transitions, and trauma benefit from consistent, predictable routines.

7. Talk openly with your grandchildren.

Having regular, age-appropriate conversations about your family's dynamics, routines, and successes will help your grandchildren understand why they are living with you and feel proud of their unique family.

UPCOMING EVENTS & TRAININGS



MANAGING THREATENING CONFRONTATIONS

Offered by the Waisman Center of UW–Madison

- When: Wednesday, February 11, 2026 • 9:00 am – 3:00 pm
- Where: 2238 S Park St, Madison, WI 53713 (UW South)

Managing Threatening Confrontations is designed to assist you in learning how to effectively support individuals who could experience the full range of behavioral escalation.

Stages of escalation are described, and each stage is paired with a positive action plan for caregivers as well as teams. The content places strong emphasis on proactive supports. During the second half of the training seminar, you will learn passive self-protection techniques that can be used in challenging situations. Learn how to protect oneself from various types of aggression. The “Managing Threatening Confrontations” approach believes in disengaging and “running with dignity”. If disengagement isn’t possible, then these passive self-protection techniques will hopefully give you the foundation to protect yourself if needed.

\$75 per participant (I am able to reimburse you!)

Space is limited to 25 participants

Register here: https://uwmadison.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_dgoQiTxKdjrE9xA

SAVE THE DATE – JUNE 6, 2026 – FAMILIES LIKE MINE CONFERENCE

Families Like Mine has a brand-new format for relative caregivers and like-kin caregivers. Join us for a day of fun at the Henry Vilas Zoo. Resources will be provided, fun family activities will occur, and families will have the opportunity to network with other kinship care families. Stay tuned for additional details and registration information!



Save the Dates!

You spoke. We listened.

Families Like Mine has a whole new look this year!



Each event will:

- Feature regional and state-wide vendors that support relative and like-kin caregiving families
- Provide opportunities to connect with experienced relative and like-kin caregivers to build support and connection
- Offer a family activity for relative and like-kin caregivers to bond with the children in their care

Join us at one of three regional events across Wisconsin—bringing resources and connections to relative and like-kin caregivers like you!

- **December 6, 2025**, at the Coalition for Children, Youth & Families in **Milwaukee**
- **May 16, 2026**, in **Rhineland** (location to be determined)
- **June 6, 2026**, at the Henry Vilas Zoo in **Madison**



More details about each event will be coming soon!

MORE EVENTS & TRAININGS



SAFE SLEEP COACHING

Offerings Jan-June 2026

2-hour workshop

For all working with infants and families with infants.

Training aimed specifically at reducing sleep-related deaths

Learn the safest way to put babies to sleep -- including a crib demonstration

Join the Waitlist:

https://forms.office.com/pages/responsepage.aspx?id=s5sbkznNYUiFEfLUCYoZecm_x9Wr8SFMgtDCEzeGzfdUMzVWSUtEVoVWSTVHWDVZUUJLT'TZXWULTTC4u&route=shorturl

Dates Offered:

Jan 20th 2-4pm CST

Feb 17th 2-4pm CST

Mar 17th 2-4pm CST

Apr 21st 2-4pm CST

May 19th 2-4pm CST

June 16th 2-4pm CST



ST. LUKE'S LUTHERAN CHURCH - MIDDLETON
LUKE'S CLOSET

CLOTHING FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER / ADOPTIVE / KINSHIP CARE
AVAILABLE VIA DELIVERY, APPOINTMENT OR SHOP & EAT EVENTS

► **DELIVERY**
Complete an online request form and clothing will be delivered to the location of your choice, including your home. **Delivery options** (current business hours listed online):

- MADISON EAST Trinity Lutheran, 1904 Winnerbago St.
- MADISON EAST YMCA, 711 Cottage Grove Rd.
- MADISON NORTH Dane Co. Human Services, 1202 Northport Dr.
- MADISON SOUTH Dane Co. Human Services, 2306 S. Park St.
- MADISON WEST YMCA, 5515 Medical Cir.
- MIDDLETON St. Luke's Lutheran Church, 7337 Hubbard Ave.
- MT. HOREB Evangelical Lutheran Church of Mt. Horeb, 315 E. Main St.
- SUN PRAIRIE Our Savior's Lutheran Church, 350 Lincoln Dr.
- SUN PRAIRIE YMCA, 1470 Don Simon Dr.
- VERONA Memorial Baptist Church, 201 S. Main St.
- YOUR HOME

► **APPOINTMENT**
Have a personal shopping experience where you and/or children select the clothing.
Call 608-234-0146 to schedule an appointment with our volunteer.

► **SHOP & EAT EVENTS 2026**
Events are held 9:00am - 1:00pm at St. Luke's Lutheran Church, 7337 Hubbard Ave, Downtown Middleton:

- Saturday, April 11
- Saturday, September 19

These will be the only events in 2026. New shoes will be available at both events. Optional pre-registration will open 3 months prior to event.

► Delivery/Appointments/Shop & Eat events may be accessed seasonally or as needed.
► Shoes are only available at Shop, Shop & Eat events.

Mark your calendar!

www.stlukes-elca.org/luke-closet

10-2025

Coaching Safe Sleep for Helping Professionals

Including Crib Demonstration

This 2-hour webinar, Coaching Safe Sleep is part of the KIDS Network Safe Sleep Project aimed specifically at reducing sleep-related deaths. This presentation provides professionals with the knowledge base necessary to communicate effectively with families with Infants about safe sleep and provides skills to complete a crib demonstration with caregivers to teach the safest way to put babies to sleep.



Audience: All helping professionals working with families with infants, including (but not limited to) child welfare, law enforcement, child care providers, health care professionals, and first responders.

- | | |
|---|--|
| January 20 th 3:00-5:00 PM ET | April 21 st 3:00-5:00 PM ET |
| February 17 th 3:00-5:00 PM ET | May 19 th 3:00-5:00 PM ET |
| March 17 th 3:00-5:00 PM ET | June 16 th 3:00-5:00 PM ET |

Certificates of attendance will be provided.

Did our sessions fill up?
Can't attend these dates?

[Join the Waitlist](#)



LUKE'S CLOSET 2026 EVENTS

2026 Shop & Eat Events

April 11th

September 19th



**Dane county
relative kinship
resource group**
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/2318412981742488>

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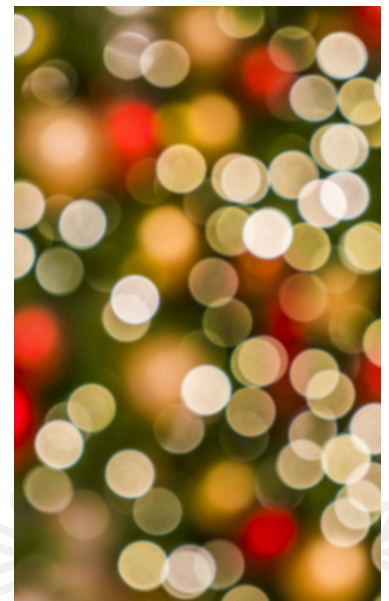
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