



Family Ties



Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine, Inc.

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Newsletter

December 2013

Assisting Youth Through the Holidays

12 Ideas for Supportive Adults to Help Their Young Person Through the Holidays

1. Prepare the youth in your care for the holidays in your home

Have a discussion with the young person about your family's holiday customs. Do you celebrate over multiple days, or is there one "main" celebration? Are there religious customs? Will gifts be exchanged? What should they wear? Who will they meet? What preparations need to be done in advance? Will there be visitors to the home? Will they be taken on visits to the homes of other family or friends? And in all of these events, will your youth be expected to participate? Knowing what to expect will help to decrease anxiety around the holidays. Avoid surprises and you will decrease seasonal tensions.

2. Prepare friends and family before you visit

Let people know in advance about new family members in your home. Surprising a host or hostess at the door with a "new" foster youth may set up an awkward situation—such as a scramble to set an extra place at the table—making the young person feel like an imposition right from the start of the visit. Your preparation of friends should help cut down on awkward, but reasonable questions such as "who are you?" or "where did you come from?"

3. Remember confidentiality

You may receive well intended but prying questions from those you visit with over the holidays. If your young person is new to your home, it is natural that family members ask questions about your youth's background. Understand that questions are generally not meant to be insensitive or rude, but simply come from a place of not knowing much about foster care. Think in advance about how to answer these questions while maintaining your youth's confidentiality. Use the opportunity to educate interested family and friends. Discuss with your young person how they would like to be introduced and what is appropriate to share about their history

with your family and friends. (Remember, they have no obligation to reveal their past.)

4. Arrange meeting your family in advance, if possible

The hustle and bustle of the holidays can make it particularly chaotic for your young person to participate in your family traditions. Anxiety may run high for young people already, and the stress of meeting your relatives may be a lot to deal with. If possible, you can arrange a casual "meeting" in advance of "main events." if it is not possible or practical to meet beforehand, make a list of names of some of the people they'll meet and their connections to you. You can also encourage a quick call from relatives you plan to visit to deliver a personal message of "we are excited to meet you" so that your youth knows they will be welcome.

5. Have extra presents ready to help offset differences

It should not be expected that all relatives purchase presents for your youth. Be prepared with other small gifts and for those family members that express concern over not having brought a gift, offer one of your "backups" for them to place under the tree. Extra presents may be addressed "from Santa" even for older youth, to help offset a larger number of gifts other children 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 sometimes quantity is important.

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6. Facilitate visits with loved ones

The holidays can be a busy time for everyone including foster parents and caseworkers. But it is especially important during this time of year to help your young person arrange for visits with loved ones. Don't allow busy schedules to mean the postponement of these important visits. Try to get permission for your youth to make phone calls to relatives (if long distance charges are an issue, ask if calls can be placed from the foster care agency to provide a local business or individual to "donate" by allowing the use of their phone). A youth may wish to extend holiday wishes to relatives and friends from an old neighborhood, but may need your help getting phone numbers together. Use the opportunity to help the youth develop their own address book.

7. Help them make sure their loved ones are okay

Young people may worry that their family members are struggling through the holidays. If homelessness has been a regular issue, the winter season may bring cold weather and extreme hardship. Your youth may experience guilt if they feel a loved one is struggling while they, the youth, are living in comfort. Knowing that a biological parent or sibling has shelter from the cold or has their other basic needs met may ease a young person's mind through the always emotional holidays.

8. Extend an invitation

If it is safe and allowed by your foster care agency, consider extending an invitation to siblings or bio parents through the holidays. It need not be an invitation to your "main" holiday event, consider a "special" dinner for your youth to celebrate with their loved ones. If this is not a possibility to do within your home, consider arranging a visit at a local restaurant (ask the caseworker if it would be appropriate for the visit to be unsupervised or if your supervision would suffice). Extending an invitation to their loved ones need not signal to a young person that you support their bio-family's lifestyle or choices—rather it tells a young person that you respect their wishes to stay connected to family. You will also send a message to the youth that they aren't being put in a position to "choose" your family over their bio-family and that it is possible to have a relationship with all the people they care about.

9. Understand and encourage your youth's own traditions and beliefs

Encourage discussion about the holiday traditions your young person experienced prior to being in foster care, or even celebrations they liked while living with other foster families. Incorporate the traditions the youth cherishes into your own family celebration, if possible. Use the opportunity to investigate the youth's culture and research customary traditions. If the young person holds a religious belief different from yours, or if their family did, check into the traditions customarily surrounding those beliefs.

10. Assist in purchasing or making holiday gifts or in sending cards to their family and friends

Allow young people to purchase small gifts for their relatives, or help them craft homemade gifts. Help send holiday cards to those that they want to stay connected with. The list of people that your youth wishes to send cards and gifts to should be left completely to the youth, although precautions may be taken to ensure safety (for example, a return address may be left off the package, or use the address of the foster care agency) and compliance with any court orders.

11. Understand if they pull away

Despite your best efforts, a young person 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. Allow for "downtime" during the holidays that will allow the youth some time to themselves if they need it (although some youth would prefer to stay busy to keep their mind off other things—you will need to make a decision based on your knowledge of the young person). Be sure to fit in one-on-one time, personal time for your youth and you to talk through what they are feeling during this emotional and often confusing time of year.

12. Call youth who formerly lived with you

The holidays can be a particularly tough time for youth who have recently aged out of foster care. They may not have people to visit or a place to go for the holidays. In addition, young people commonly struggle financially when they first leave foster care. A single phone call may lift their spirits and signal that you continue to care for them and treasure their friendship. Be sure to include these youth on your own holiday card list. A small token gift or gift basket of homemade holiday goodies may be especially appreciated.



New Additions to the Discount Card Program!

Play Time ME!

Located at 432 Elm St. Biddeford (Across the street from
Marden's)
207-284-PLAY
www.playtimeme.com
Facebook: Play Time ME
Email: info@playtimeme.com
Discount Offered: \$2.50 admissions for all adults (50% off)



Celebrating Adoption Awareness Month!

On November 4th adoption legalizations across the state kicked off the celebrations of Adoption Awareness month. Once again the Maine Discovery Museum in Bangor and the Children's Museum & Theatre of Maine in Portland opened their doors and allowed families to celebrate this special occasion. In Portland, 16 adoptions were legalized and 130 people were present to take part in this wonderful event! Along with Bangor and Portland, the Coastal Children's Museum in Rockland took part in the celebration as well by allowing families to come explore the museum and celebrate their recent adoptions. AFFM thanks all that were involved to make this day so special and memorable for so many! We look forward to next year!

On November 7th Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine & the Kinship Program celebrated National Adoption Awareness Month once again with the annual adoption tea at the Blaine House. Families gathered and enjoyed snacks, (which included AMAZING whoopie pies) tea and punch. Following the refreshments AFFM Board President, Barbara Ford welcomed families and thanked them for the amazing job they do supporting children in care. Special guest speaker, Senator Burns read the 2013 proclamation signed by Governor LePage proclaiming November as National Adoption Awareness month. Senator Burns also read a sentiment on behalf of Senator Gratwick, recognizing AFFM and the families served. Therese Cahill-Low, director of Office of Child and Family Services, ended the ceremony by expressing her gratitude to the resource families of Maine and spoke of the importance of the work they do for children in out-of-home placements. A huge thank you goes out to the Blaine House and staff for hosting the tea for another year!



Thank you to all who made these events so special! AFFM looks forward to celebrating Adoption Awareness Month with you next year! As always, thank you for all you do for Maine's youth in care!

Resource Family Support Groups Throughout Maine

Bangor: Foster/Adoptive/Kinship. Meets from 6:00-8:00pm the 3rd Monday of every month at 26 Downeast Circle (between Davis Road and Mt. Dessert Drive), Bangor. For more information please contact AFFM at 1-800-833-9786 Please RSVP.

Belfast: Foster/Adoptive/Kinship. Meets the 4th Friday of the month at the Calvary Chapel Church in Belfast 147 Waldo Ave. in the Wentworth Building. Contact BraveFamilies@gmail.com to RSVP.

Biddeford: Foster/Adoptive Support. Meets from 9:30-11:00 am the 1st and 3rd Thursday of every month. For more information please contact Meredith Crain at 283-4314. Please call before you come.

Caribou: Foster/Adoptive/Kinship parent support. Meets every 3rd Tuesday of the month at 5:30PM at Caribou Adult Education Building on Bennett Drive in between Caribou Rec and the gas station. Childcare is provided. Please contact AFFM at 1-800-833-9786 to RSVP and to reserve a spot for childcare.

Dover-Foxcroft: Foster/Adoptive/Kinship. Meets every 2nd Tuesday of the month from 6PM-7:30PM at Mayo Regional Hospital, Borestone and Sebec conference room. Childcare is provided. Please contact AFFM at 1-800-833-9786 to RSVP and to reserve a spot for childcare.

Ellsworth: Foster/Adoptive/Kinship. Meets every 3rd Tuesday of the month from 5:30pm-7:00pm at Ellsworth Elementary/Middle School 20 Forest Ave. in Ellsworth. Child care is provided. Please contact Mindy Kane, Community Health and Counseling Services (CHCS), at 263-2014 or email MKane@chcs-me.org to reserve a spot for childcare. *Thanks to a local grant awarded to CHCS, AFFM is able to provide mileage reimbursement for families traveling more than 30 miles from home.*

Sherman: Adoptive/Kinship support. Meets the 1st Monday of the month at 7 Cow Team Road in Sherman. Please contact Debbie Irish at 365-7133 for more information. This group does not meet during the summer.

Houlton: Foster/Adoptive/Kinship support. Meets every 2nd Thursday of the month from 5:30pm-7:30pm at Houlton CHCS 2 Water Street. Childcare is provided. Please contact AFFM at 1-800-833-9786 to RSVP and to reserve a spot for childcare.

Lewiston: Foster/Adoptive/Kinship. Meets the 4th Tuesday of the month 7:00pm-9:00pm at B Street Community Center 57 Birch Street Lewiston, ME. Call Deb Hallowell at 783-3291 or 344-5101 or Lisa Cates at 336-3760.

Machias: Foster/Adoptive/Kinship. Meets every 1st Friday of the month 5:30PM-7:00PM at Rose M. Gaffney Elementary School 15 Rose Gaffney Road, Machias. Childcare is provided. Please contact Mindy Kane, Community Health and Counseling Services, at 263-2014 or email MKane@chcs-me.org to reserve a spot for childcare. *Thanks to a local grant awarded to CHCS, AFFM is able to provide mileage more than 30 miles from home.*

Rockland: Foster/Adoptive/Kinship. Meets every 3rd Monday of the month 5:30PM-7:00PM at Knox Center (Pen Bay Healthcare) 6 White Street, Rockland. Childcare is provided. Please contact AFFM at 1-800-833-9786 to RSVP and to reserve a spot for childcare.

Skowhegan: The group meets 5:30-8:00PM every second Wednesday of the month located at Skowhegan Federated Church 13 Island Avenue in Skowhegan. Childcare is provided. Please contact AFFM at 1-800-833-9786 to RSVP and to reserve a spot for childcare.

South Paris: Kinship Support. Meets 9:00AM-10:00AM every second Saturday of the month, unless noted. Meets at Deering Memorial Church, 39 Main Street, South Paris. Please RSVP to Shelley Newcomb at comb2599@roadrunner.com

South Portland: Foster/Adoptive/Kinship support. Meets at 5:30PM-7:30PM at 62 Darling Ave, South Portland. This group will meet every 2nd Tuesday of the month. Please contact Meagan Stearns at meagan@affm.net or call (207) 478-8025 to RSVP and reserve childcare.

Turner/Hartford: NEW Foster/Adoptive/Kinship. Meets every second Friday of the month 5:30-7:30PM at "A Bend in the Road" 235 Berry Road, Hartford. Please contact AFFM at 1-800-833-9786 to RSVP.

Westbrook: Foster/Adoptive/Kinship. Meets 10:00AM-12PM at the Westbrook-Warren Congregational Church at 810 Main Street. Meets every 1st Wednesday of the month. Childcare is provided. Please contact Meagan Stearns at meagan@affm.net or call (207) 478-8025 to RSVP and reserve childcare.

York: Foster/Adoptive/Kinship. This group will meet every 2nd Thursday of the month 5:30PM-6:30PM at York Hospital. Please use the Hancock Entrance, group will be held in Ellis Conference Room (on your immediate left). Please RSVP to Meagan Stearns at meagan@affm.net or call (207) 478-8025.



Frequently Asked Questions



Have you had a question about adoption, foster care, kinship care, guardianship, financial supports, working with the department, etc. that you would like to know the answer to? You're in luck! Each month the Family Ties Newsletter will feature a FAQ section. Send your questions to info@affm.net and we'll answer them the best we can!

Where can information be found on the adoption tax credit?

The North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC) is a great resource to check out for any questions regarding adoption tax credit. NACAC provides you with information on how to fill out IRS forms, what to expect, problems you may encounter, etc. Check out the link below for more information.

<http://www.nacac.org/taxcredit/taxcredit.html>

Where can information be found on federal tax benefits for resource parents?

The National Foster Parent Association (NFPA) provides a federal tax guide specifically for resource parents. NFPA is another great source of information to answer questions you may have regarding filing your taxes.

<http://nfpaonline.org/taxinfo>



Do you know someone who “aged-out” of Foster Care and is under 26?

Free Health Coverage!

On January 1, 2014, people under age 26 who were in foster care and received MaineCare when they turned 18 (or, if they extended foster care, at the time they became independent) are eligible again for MaineCare and can apply now.

With MaineCare, you can:

- Have a regular doctor and get check-ups and preventive care – like vaccines,
- Go to the doctor if you are sick or injured,
- Get mental health care,
- Get reproductive health care, including contraceptives,
- Get help paying for prescription drugs,
- Get help with transportation to medical appointments; and,
- Get other medically necessary care paid for, including hospitalization, if you need it.

If you don't already have MaineCare, you can apply by phone, on the internet, or in person. Here is how:

- **By phone:** call 1-855-797-4357 (DHHS Office of Family Independence)
- **On the internet:** go to the My Maine Connection website, www1.maine.gov/benefits/account/login.html. (This state website may be less busy than the federal one at www.healthcare.gov.)
- **In-person:** go to your nearest DHHS office. They are listed in the telephone book or on line at http://gateway.maine.gov/dhhs-apps/office_finder/

Need help? Call 211 or go to www.enroll207.org to find someone in your area who will help you apply for health care. You can also call the Help Line at 1-800-965-7476 at Consumers for Affordable Health Care for help over the phone.

Make sure to tell them you were once in foster care on an application or when getting help with an application. This should clue people in that you might fit in the “former foster care” eligibility group and should be eligible for Medicaid.



Work Readiness Workshop

Prepare for Future Employment!

If you live in York County, are age 16+, are in care or formerly in care, and are self-motivated to learn about the workplace, this is an **INCREDIBLE OPPORTUNITY!**

This winter the Southern Maine Youth Transition Network (SMYTN) will provide youth with work readiness workshops. You will get the chance to learn new job skills and participate in mock job interviews.

- You will receive a \$20 stipend for attending each of the workshops; if you attend all 5 workshops, you will be entered into a raffle for a \$100 gift certificate.
- You will be provided snacks during each workshop!
- You will have the chance to participate in a mock interview with York County employers!
- You will be provided with education on how to apply for summer employment
- Most, importantly you will develop the confidence needed to apply for summer jobs!

Data from past sessions:

- 83 % of participants reported feeling more comfortable with completing applications and interviewing
- On average employed youth earned over \$1,000.00 at their summer worksites

- When: January/February 2014
3:30pm—5:30pm
- Where: DHHS Building
Conference Room A
208 Graham St., Biddeford
- Workshops will be held:
 - Tuesday January 14, 2014
 - Tuesday January 21, 2014
 - Tuesday January 29, 2014
 - Tuesday February 5, 2014
 - Tuesday February 12, 2014
(snow date Feb 25)



Your caseworker will send referral information to Dulcey Laberge—dulcey.laberge@maine.gov

- Youth name, age, phone and/or email contact information

BY DECEMBER 16, 2013

*The Southern Maine Youth Transition Network is part of the statewide Maine Youth Transition Collaborative
www.maine-ymt.org*

A Special Word of Thanks!

AFFM was pleased to collaborate with Sam's Clubs in Bangor and Augusta to collect donated pajamas and books for children in care.

Thank you to AFFM staff members, Tammy Cutchen, Jim Hatch, Sheila Peakall and Shirley Ross for taking time on a Saturday to make this happen. Thank you also to the staff and management of both Sam's Club stores. A special thank you to Jane Hopkins, foster mother and associate at Sam's in Bangor who initiated the project. Many children will be snug and warm this winter in no small part due to your efforts.
You are appreciated.



Interested in a scholarship or finding out more information about scholarships? The National Foster Parent Association is a great resource to check out! Simply go to <http://www.nfpaonline.org/education> for more information. Also check out the North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC) for more great resources! www.nacac.org

Kinship Corner

Are you parenting your relatives' child or children? If so, your world has changed a lot from what it once was or from what you imagined it would be at this time in your life. Change and transitions are difficult for all. Children may in addition to having to deal with the loss of their birth parents and home, may be angry and /or suffering from emotional and or physical abuse. All of these feelings may be magnified by embarrassment and feelings of abandonment.

There are ways to help that may also make your life a bit easier.

1. Have a routine schedule that is predictable and consistent.
2. Make the child's room their own by having the child assist in decorating. (Include photos of Mom and Dad and siblings. Also if possible have bedding and pillows from their birth home. The smell and feel of familiar objects can be soothing.
3. Keep an open line of communication. Don't rush into answer questions for the child. Allow the child to respond in their own words, time and language.
4. Use positive approach to discipline. Use logical consequences and use each opportunity as a time to learn. Be quick to reward appropriate behavior.
5. Explain the rules of your home and keep them simple and fair.

Make the experience between you and the child special

1. Take time to read and to play together. (Let the child chose the play time activity and select books together.)
2. Spending time at the local library may give you and the child the opportunity to both select books and for the child to assist you in computer skills. (You are never too old to learn)
3. You need time for you as well.
4. Join your local kinship support group. (AFFM has a group in most areas of the state) If a support group does not suit your lifestyle at this time perhaps a mentor who empathizes with kinship care will be useful)
5. Take care of yourself. If you are not healthy you won't be able to keep up with an active child or children.
6. Take time to have fun and enjoy the child and extended family relationship.

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National Foster Parent Association

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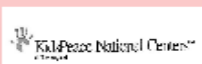
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RESOURCE PARENT TRAINING COLLABORATIVE



WHO WE ARE:

THE RESOURCE PARENT TRAINING COLLABORATIVE IS A GROUP OF AGENCIES THAT WORKS TOGETHER TO PROVIDE TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES TO RESOURCE FAMILIES. OUR HOPE IS TO PROVIDE TRAININGS TO ASSIST FAMILIES IN BETTER SERVING THE CHILDREN IN THEIR HOME AND TO ASSIST THEM IN MEETING THE LICENSING HOURS REQUIREMENT.

WE MEET ONCE A MONTH TO DISCUSS CURRENT EVENTS , THE NEEDS OF THE FAMILIES, AND HOW WE CAN WORK TO PROVIDE TRAININGS.

We are looking for input from you!

Please let us know what trainings would be of interest to you. Tell us how to make it easier for you to attend the trainings. Send Margaret an email at margaret@affm.net and let us know how to Improve the Resource Parent Training Collaborative. For Southern Maine Families send Meagan an email at meagan@affm.net