

# THE INSTITUTE FOR INNOVATION & IMPLEMENTATION

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## Partnering with families in Wraparound & FOCUS *Tips on Family Gatherings & Holiday Seasons*

The holidays, although intended to be a time to reflect, rejoice, and rejuvenate, are also considered by many to be one of the most stressful times of the year. This **stress is often heightened for families experiencing complex mental, emotional, and behavioral health needs and are engaged in intermediate or intensive care coordination**. According to NAMI 64% of people with mental illness report the holidays make their conditions worse and can lead to the increase in crisis events and other risks/challenges. What can **we as care coordinators do** to ensure that the children, youth, and families we partner with feel supported during this often difficult time of year and make it through the holidays successfully?

### **Be Curious & use Cultural Humility:**

- Be mindful of the many different cultural and religious holidays celebrated during the last months of the calendar year and the different meanings they may have for those who celebrate them. See this list:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_multinational\\_festivals\\_and\\_holidays#December](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_multinational_festivals_and_holidays#December)
- Ask how the families you work with perceive the holiday season and what, if anything, they celebrate/practice. Talk with each family about what is most important to them, what is hardest, what worries they have, and what would be most helpful to them during the holiday season.
- **Families celebrate the holidays and make meaning in different ways.** It is important that we do not make assumptions based on our own experiences about the traditions and beliefs of other families.
- New strengths and important relationships may be uncovered in this discovery of holiday practices and traditions. Use this information to inform teaming and planning.
- Many organizations honor certain holidays and/or have specific holiday hours. These limitations can put pressure on families to schedule their meetings earlier in the month and limit crisis response. Create internal organizational plans to address such barriers for families.

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- Youth living outside of their homes should have a voice in the traditions being carried out within their foster placement, group home, or hospital setting. **Ask youth about positive memories and important traditions** that can be infused into their current home. Advocate for them to have access to important relationships outside of the system that is housing them.
- **Acknowledge loss.** Families may be experiencing reminders of grief and loss during the holiday season particularly within the past two years due to COVID-19, natural disasters, trauma, etc. Remember that the holidays are not cheerful for everyone, and that traditions, rituals, and other celebratory activities are impacted by these experiences.

### **Crisis Planning during the holidays:**

- Routines, services, and supports will look different during the holidays so take time in October and November to **identify, discuss, and plan for holiday-specific triggers and action steps.** Consider trauma triggers such as forced hugs, crowded spaces, sitting on Santa's lap, parties with alcohol, gift exchanges, loud noises, specific family members or friends, etc. as well as how schedules can be impacted by holiday travel and participation in events and activities.
- Work with the family and team to mitigate risk for a higher level of care, which may displace a youth away from their home during the holidays. If youth are in such a setting, additional time and planning may be needed to find opportunities for home passes or discharges prior to the often scaled-back staffing of the holiday season.

### **Provide Access:**

- The holidays can include an increased level of community activities that may escalate feelings of isolation for families of children with complex needs. Utilize planning time to step out opportunities for youth and their families to engage in activities with the best chance of success. This may include brainstorming

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- **creative ways to participate in holiday fun as** well as developing an individualized list of options. Examples include: Talking to Santa from far away rather than on their lap; utilizing battery operated candles rather than lit candles for religious activities; supportive people lending a hand during activities and providing breaks for the youth and/or parent; sensory-intentional holiday activities.
- Some families may find it important to protect holiday time, and service providers will need to consider how to honor this boundary setting. Others may ask for a packed schedule. Create space for planning discussions and strategizing. Care Coordinators need to be able to **respect the preferences of the family** and ensure they are respected by other service providers.

### **Be relevant & intentional in planning:**

- Be proactive! **Plan ahead so that families can feel in control of their agenda** during the season. Unstructured days off from school should be coordinated with individualized activities and relevant care to reduce stress during winter breaks.
- Complete community mapping for charitable giving and resources early in the season. Many families may need support in planning for basic needs to carry out traditions and/or compensate for the lost nutrition provided within school settings.
- Be mindful of interruptions due to holiday events. Strategies and tasks should be carefully planned so that **families can get the help they need when they need it** without disruption to their ability to practice beliefs and traditions.
- Somatic health and COVID-19 precautions should be considered when strategizing and creating a meaningful and effective plan during the holidays. Cold weather and scented candles can increase asthma, holiday foods may bring on spikes in insulin, and group gathering may increase risk for COVID-19.
- Reflect on the holidays after the season during your CFTM or CFM. If it went well, why? Were more relevant supports involved? If it did not go well, what was missing? **Use this rich information to build a more relevant plan all year long.**