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A SECOND CHANCE^{INC.}



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News, Networking & Information for
Kinship Care Professionals & Advocates



For Children, 'The Most Wonderful Time of the Year' Can Be Wrought with Triggers

Trauma-Informed Care, Connecting with Kin Can Help Them Manage the Holiday Season

Strings of brightly colored lights, glowing candles and festive songs, are wrapped up in the wonder and joy of the holiday season. But for some children in care, these things can also represent massive emotional triggers.



“This time of year, can stir up trauma that youth may have experienced or endured during past holidays,” says Timothy Gonzalez, LCSW (shown left), president and lead clinician at A Wellness Place in Pittsburgh, Pa. As we head into the Christmas season, he says, feelings of loss and grief may also be ignited in children. Then there are children who are able to embrace the holidays and new traditions that they find with their kinship family.

As a family therapist, Gonzalez has seen both. “I don’t think that children have just one reaction to Christmas and the holidays, there is a continuum, with positive experiences that come from them being in a stable and nurturing kinship environment, and there are those who have negative, emotional hurdles that they are working through.”

The former kinship care provider and caseworker, says the stability that kinship care provides, along with mental health supports, is what can help to keep children well, regardless of the season. Central to the well-being of children and families, Gonzalez adds, is trauma-informed practice.

Tara Skibiel, LCSW, executive vice president of Child and Family Services for Pittsburgh at A Second Chance, Inc., agrees.

“Having access to mental health clinicians as a part of a child’s team provides them with direct services like in-home crisis intervention and short-term treatment when they need it. These kinds of services are a part of a continuum of care that doesn’t end when a child’s case is closed, and they find a permanent home,” Skibiel adds.

The Gift of Transportation and Family

Visitation with parents and relatives, especially during the holidays, helps children to cope while staying connected to familiar traditions and places, Gonzalez adds. But nationally, one of the biggest challenges to keeping those family bonds strong and unbroken is children’s access to transportation.

Ensuring that children have regular visits with their parents and other family members, can be an enormous logistical challenge for agency’s responsible for transporting them. Coordinating visits, drop-offs and pick-ups for children served by A Second Chance, Inc., for example, is work that doesn’t stop—even on Christmas Day.

But for employees like Dana Cralle, who support this nimble work, transporting children and supervising their visits is more than about logistics and data points. Cralle, a veteran member of the agency’s Family Service Transportation (FST) team, remembers being one of about 8 drivers dispatched to transport an estimated 100 children a month. That was nearly 20 years ago. Today, she is a part of a 43-member team that coordinates, manages and provides transportation for nearly 1,800 children a month.

Helping children to maintain visits with their parents during the holidays, Cralle says, has been among the highlights of

her decades on the job. “I remember how excited the children would be around the holidays when they knew that they would be spending time with their parents, especially if the visit was taking place in the home. You could see the joy in their eyes when they got to help their parents put up the Christmas tree, hang the lights and wrap presents for other family members. It always made me feel good when they felt good.”

When Cralle was a young mother, she says kinship made it possible for her to do her job and leave her son at home on Christmas day. Cralle had parents and other relatives to care for him and serve as her support system. “As my son got older, he understood that mommy had other children and families who needed her,” even during the holidays.

The Role of Compassion and Empathy



This month, James Middleton, also a longtime member of the FST staff at A Second Chance, Inc., recalled his childhood and the joy he had growing up with family in a home that was steeped in holiday tradition. Today, it's that same holiday spirit and those good times that he wants the children that he transports to also know and have—even when it means leaving his own children and family at home during the holidays to ensure that children in kinship care can maintain their scheduled visits with parents and

family.

This kind of compassion and empathy are what's needed to deliver trauma-informed care to children and families. It's also important to help children to cope with their loss, memories of holidays past and how to create new traditions in kinship care, Gonzalez adds. "We can start by acknowledging their feelings and letting children know that they aren't alone."

PRACTICAL APPROACHES

Coping with the Holidays

We know that the holiday season can be a tough time for many people, including children, caregivers and families, especially when they are unable to spend it with loved ones. The holidays can also trigger emotions and painful memories, which can add to the seasonal stress.

Consider this guidance from Timothy Gonzalez and other national experts on supporting children during the holidays:

Says Gonzalez: "There is a significant mental health need in the kinship-foster care population, largely because of the trauma children have experienced and identity development. These are issues that have huge emotional ramifications and can be triggered during the holidays."

Take time to talk. The cornerstones of therapeutic treatment are "openness and awareness." Give children permission to acknowledge and name the tough and hurtful things that are happening to them, like being away from their parents and siblings. While caregivers may not be able to "fix the situation," they can give

children the opportunity to be open about what concerns them and provide space talk about it.

Facilitate visits and calls with a child's biological parents and those in the kinship triad. During the holidays, children may also want to return to their old neighborhood to bring greetings and visit with friends.

Make holiday plans with children and integrate them into the family's traditions. And consider including some of theirs. Start by asking the child if there are special memories, traditions or even food and music that they want to include and share with the family during the holidays.

Celebrate the beauty of kinship care. It can give children opportunities to experience the holidays in a way that they never did before.

Visit us on [Facebook](#) to learn more and gather tips on how to help children and families cope during the holidays.

News & Information You Can Use

KENTUCKY: [Need for 'Kinship Care Program' in Kentucky Remains High](#) (Includes audio)

Terry Brooks, executive director of Kentucky Youth Advocates, said the onus of taking care of the estimated 96,000 Kentucky children living with kin is also on the community. He says social factors like poverty, rising incarceration rates and the opioid crisis have all

added to the kinship care spike.

PENNSYLVANIA: [A Pennsylvania Social Worker Wrote A Children's Book About Drug Overdose To Help Kids Cope \(includes audio\)](#)

Over the last few years, Melody Ray has fielded many calls seeking advice on how to talk to kids about addiction and overdose. So, she wrote a book. This year she published her book, called "Someone I Love Died From A Drug Overdose."

CONNECTICUT: [Grandparents raising kids born to addicted parents](#)

An epidemic of opioid abuse in Connecticut and throughout the country has killed parents, and left others incarcerated, homeless or barred from parenting.

OHIO: [Jean Coleman's ministry helps grandparents raising grandchildren](#)

A pastor launches a new kinship care ministry that provides counseling services to grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. The new program is a part of the Redbird Resilient anti-drug effort in Loudonville.

MAINE: [Maine's Hospitals, and Foster Care, Beleaguered by Drug-Exposed Infants](#)

Maine has one of the highest rates of opiate-affected babies in the country, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. An average of 975 drug-affected babies were born each year in the state – nearly three a day – between 2013 and 2017.

NEW HAMPSHIRE: [Data show link between childhood trauma,](#)

adult health

Nearly half of all New Hampshire adults say they experienced stressful or traumatic events in childhood, and new data released this month show those experiences are hurting their health today.

NEW JERSEY: [Increase slows in abused, neglected children, but costs keep soaring](#)

The increase in abused and neglected children slowed this year, but 2018 will likely end with a record number of children in the county's protective care, and at a record cost.

NATIONAL: [Opioids Exact Another Toll on Newborns: Smaller Heads](#)

Infants born addicted to opioids may be more likely to have smaller heads that might hinder their development, new research suggests.

INTERNATIONAL

AUSTRALIA: [Helping kids and families get the help they need when they need it](#) (Opinion)

The redesign of the country's Child Safety System reached a milestone with the launch of a new 24-hour statewide advice and referral phone service for children and families. The Strong Families, Safe Kids Advice and Referral Line provides a "single front door" service that connects callers with the help they need through a range of government and non-government services and programs.

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