

# COPING WITH CHRISTMAS






## PLUS OTHER FAMILY, CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS CELEBRATIONS

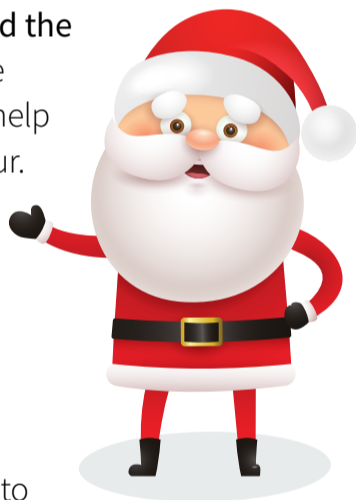
While many of us look forward to Christmas and other celebrations, for children in care it can be the complete opposite. It can actually be a very difficult time for them, and they can act out. But, there are things you can do to understand a child's behaviour and help them prepare and enjoy upcoming celebrations.



For many children who have experienced trauma, Christmas can be another reminder they are 'different'. It brings memories of their past, plus feelings of grief and loss that plague their ability to enjoy celebrations. Christmas may also be associated with times where adults were dangerous, there was no food or gifts, or being disconnected from family, friends, culture and community. It may also be a time of longing to be with birth family, making it difficult for the child to celebrate or appreciate their current environment with you.

Fortunately, there are things you can do to make Christmas and other celebrations more enjoyable for the child, and to re-frame celebrations in their mind as positive experiences.

### Tips to help children enjoy celebrations

-  **Understand stress responses (yours and the child's):** This means being attuned to the child's needs and feelings. Doing so will help you respond to any challenging behaviour.
-  **Limit changes to routines:** As much as possible, keep the child's routines the same. Consider 'anchor points' like morning and night-time rituals, and plan how you will keep these as normal as possible. Let the child know what will be different on the day, like getting up early to get ready for travel, or eating lunch with extended family.
-  **Prepare:** Give children as much notice as possible about any changes. Consider... Where are you going and why? Who will be there? What can the child expect? What will the sensory environment be like (sight, smell, touch, hearing, tastes)?
-  **Allow time:** Factor in additional time to help prepare the child for any expected transitions, like going from one house to another.
-  **Be open and honest:** Have honest conversations with the child about their birth family. Ensure conversations are age and developmentally appropriate and be mindful of the child's sense of grief and loss.



-  **Choose a safe person:** Identify someone the child can be with or talk to if they do not feel safe or become overwhelmed or over-stimulated.
-  **Make a Plan B:** Think about how the child could let you know when they need support or plans need to change? For example, you might decide together for the child to find you and squeeze your hand when they need your help.
-  **Build in quiet time:** Build in opportunities for relaxation, mindfulness, self-care and quiet to help achieve calming moments – for the child and yourself.
-  **Use 'time-in':** Children who have experienced trauma are more likely to benefit from 'time-in' than time-out. This means spending time one-on-one with the child to help them name, organise and understand their feelings – rather than time-out where they are left alone to often think about their behaviour and emotions. Time-in can help the child slow down and raise things they may not otherwise have thought of.
-  **Consider culture:** Christmas isn't celebrated by all cultures or families. Understand the child and their family's rituals, celebrations, traditions and culture. Be inclusive and aware, and also consider other celebrations such as Diwali, Ramadan and Eid, and Hanukkah.
-  **Communicate:** Consider what you might tell your own family and friends about how the child may feel about or react to upcoming celebrations. Sometimes, such conversations are needed to ensure those around the child, especially adults, can provide a consistent way to support the child.



These tips can be used for all types of cultural and special celebrations, including birthdays and graduations.

Note: The terms 'child' and 'children' also refer to 'young person' and 'young people'.

Here to help! Come and talk to us if you'd like more practical ways you can be trauma informed.

#### Sources:

- > Knapp, T., Littler, N., Brown, C. (2014). *The Neurobiology of Christmas – 10 things Parents and Carers can do to help a traumatised child cope with this holiday season.* The Australian Childhood Foundation
- > Source images: Freepik.com (pch.vector)



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