


Every year, 513,000 young people spend the holidays in foster care. As the national network for youth, FosterClub has dedicated itself to comforting those young people and raising public awareness about their needs as part of an annual campaign called **FosterClub's Hope for the Holidays**. You can support the effort by passing this guide on to young people, then visit www.fosterclub.org and download our publication for supportive adults, *Ideas to Help Kids Through the Holidays*, and a policy report produced in collaboration with the Kids Are Waiting campaign, *No Home for the Holidays*.

A photograph of four young people standing together and smiling. From left to right: a young man in a yellow t-shirt, a young woman in a black top with a necklace, a young woman in a green top with a red collar, and a young man in a red t-shirt.

*FosterClub's
Guide for
Young People
in Foster Care*

Pictured above: FosterClub All-Stars Schylar (from Montana, in foster care for 11 years), Jen (Michigan, 10 years), Eprise (Indiana, 13 years), and Alex (Colorado, 4 years)

getting through the

Holidays

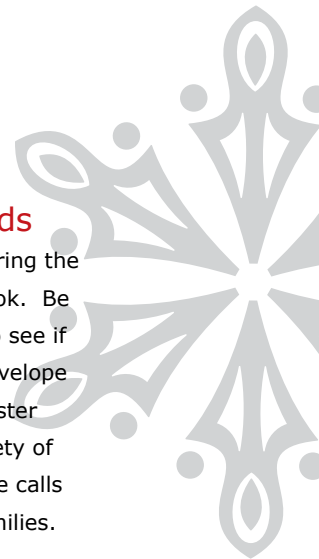
About this Guide.

Lots of people talk about how stressful the holidays can be. But we REALLY understand just how tough it can be for young people in foster care. How do we know? Because we've been there. So we've put together 10 tips for youth in foster care, developed by young people who know first-hand what it's like. We are FosterClub, the national network for young people in foster care. Visit us at www.fosterclub.com.

tip #1

Stay connected to family and friends

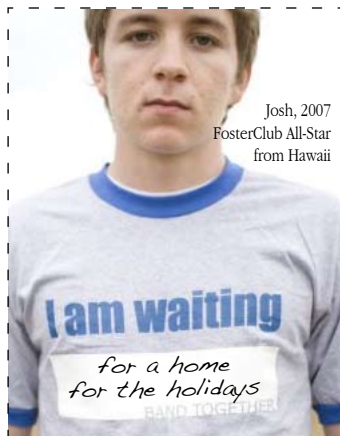
Purchase or make cards to send out to family and friends during the holidays. It's a great time to create or update an address book. Be respectful of a foster family's privacy and check with them to see if you should place the return address of their house on the envelope or if you should use an alternative, like the address of the foster care agency (some people may have concerns about the safety of the home if too many people have the address). Make phone calls to friends from an old neighborhood or to previous foster families.



FosterClub :: the national network for young people in foster care

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Josh, 2007
FosterClub All-Star
from Hawaii

what you can do

Band Together! At FosterClub, we believe state foster care agencies should be able to use money from the U.S. government to help more kids in foster care find permanent families — through reunification, adoption, living with relatives, and by preventing kids from going into foster care in the first place. We are working with the Kids Are Waiting campaign to tell politicians to change the laws and reform foster care financing. Join the effort at www.bandtogether.org!

tip #2 Advocate for visits

Let your foster parents and caseworker know how important visits are to you during the holidays. Do what you can to help arrange the visits, whether that means being flexible with your schedule or helping to make the arrangements with those you wish to visit. Understand that the holidays can be a busy time for everyone, so you may need to “remind” them frequently to do what it takes to get a visit arranged. If they need a little help in understanding where you’re coming from, give them a copy of this publication to back you up!

tip #3 Let ‘em wag

If you’re a dog lover, you’re in a category with lots of other people who adore their pets. Throughout the holiday, the Humane Society often needs help in adopting out animals. During this rewarding work you can walk and bathe dogs, teach them new tricks, and help them find good homes. Some shelters hold photos sessions as fundraisers so pet owners can have their dog or cat pose with Santa. Check with your local shelter or pet store to see if they might be hosting a fundraiser of this kind and how you can assist them.

tip #4 Connect at church

If you belong to a church, check into all the holiday activities that might be going on and join in! Activities around the holidays might include social gatherings, caroling (singing around the neighborhood), volunteer efforts, and extra services. If you do not belong to a church but have been thinking about joining, the holidays can be a fun time to get involved.



“Holidays are such a tough time for people like us who don’t have our families around us. Acknowledge your feelings and understand it’s all right to be hurt. Try talking with someone you feel comfortable with about how you are feeling just to get it out. Then try to find something good about the situation and make the best of it.”

— FosterClub member Nicole, age 24, from Oregon, in foster care 6 years



“For me, acknowledging my pain, and letting those close to me know what I am going through even if they don’t completely understand, has helped me. I would tell them to make sure and do something for themselves during this time of year. This is tough sometimes, especially if you want to be alone.

Hanging out with a friend can help to get your mind off things for a little bit of time. I often do things for others during this time of year, to help me feel better too; such as volunteering at a food bank, taking some time out to help a friend, or sending some cards out to those who have made a difference in my life.

I think it is important to find a balance during the holiday seasons, since they are times that scream “family,” “togetherness,” and “traditions.” I have to define what these words mean to me every year, and every year, I continue to find my balance. It’s not easy, but I deserve it and my brothers and sisters in foster care deserve it too.”

— FosterClub member Lupe, age 25, from Arizona, in foster care 20 years



“I still suffer from what I like to call the ‘foster holiday’ syndrome. I never did and never will ever enjoy a holiday like youth that have homes and best friends to experience them with. . . . My holidays with my real family weren’t too great either but I knew in my heart what the holidays of any sort were supposed to consist of and that was Family. Family coming together as one.”

— FosterClub member Juan, age 19, from Missouri, in foster care over 9 years

tip #5 Write on

If you like to write, keep a daily journal for the holiday season. Use your writing as a way to vent feelings, work through anxiety and worries, and reflect on the true meaning of the holidays. Some find it helpful to write “letters”, even if they will never be sent, to loved ones you are missing or who have passed away. If you are inclined, you can send your stories into info@fosterclub.com.

tip #6 Be yourself

Chances are you’ll naturally be meeting and running into lots of people during the holiday season. The simplest things can connect you to someone, and one of the easiest places to get started is by being yourself and showing kindness. Compliments always make people feel special and recognized. Start by noticing something unusual or unique about the person. Admire a piece of their jewelry, a tie they’re wearing, or their impressive vocabulary. By pointing out something remarkable and singular, you can easily start up a conversation or make a new friend.

tip #7 Lend a hand

Volunteering can unite people with similar values. Offer to help the Salvation Army or local soup kitchen with their Christmas dinner. Hold reading sessions for kids at your local library or bookstore where you can read their favorite Christmas stories to them. If you’re uncertain where to start, ask your foster parent, caseworker or a neighbor to help you research the possibilities (who knows — they may even join you!).



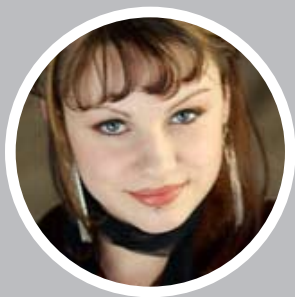
Lucy, Jojo, Sherena, Alex and Crystal hanging out, FosterClub-style.

Make a difference for other kids in foster care. If you’re reading this, hopefully you’ve gained some perspective about how to get through the holiday season. Now share your knowledge with other young people who may be struggling. Pass this document on to foster youth you know. Ask your caseworker to do the same. Check with your foster parent about sending it out to a foster parent association they belong to. Pull together a group through your Independent Living Program and plan a holiday get together.

“Know when you are an adult you will illustrate the importance of family and do everything you can to spend time with the ones you love. Because of your bumper holidays in care I know you will go the extra mile to make holidays as special as possible. You will see the joy in your children’s eyes; acquire recipes from friends, and share stories with supportive adults.

This part of your life may be painful and it will also be short. You will be one of the most fun people to spend a holiday with because you will most likely want to do as much as possible to make it as significant as possible!

Now that I am an adult I have already created new holiday traditions with my partner. We always play a board game on New Year’s Eve and I make special fudge for my friends and family. Christmas is one of my favorite times because my friends come home from college and we have get togethers at my place.



I am sure you too will create your own traditions. Our experiences make us stronger, brighter and more motivated individuals!”

— FosterClub member Shawn, age 21, from Michigan, in foster care 4 years

easy as fudge

FosterClub’s Fabulous Fudge. Follow Shawn’s example and create your own tradition! Make it and share!

INGREDIENTS:

3 cups (18 ounces) semi-sweet chocolate chips
One 14 ounce can sweetened condensed milk (NOT evaporated milk)
1/8 teaspoon salt
1 1/2 teaspoon vanilla
1 cup chopped walnuts (optional)
Holiday sprinkles or other candy decorations (optional)

PAN PREPARATION:

Line an 8 or 9 inch square pan with foil extending about 2 inches up each side (Makes it easier to remove the fudge later). Lightly spray the foil with non-stick cooking spray. Set aside.

STOVE TOP DIRECTIONS:

Put chocolate chips, milk and salt in a pan. Melt over low to medium-low heat while stirring occasionally. When everything is melted, take off heat and stir in vanilla and walnuts (if desired).

MICROWAVE DIRECTIONS:

Put chocolate chips into a 2 quart bowl and microwave for 1 minute. Stir with a wooden spoon. If the chips are not melted, microwave again for 30 seconds, then stir until smooth. Add the sweetened condensed milk, salt and vanilla and walnuts (if desired).

FINAL STEPS:

Pour into foil-lined square pan and spread evenly. Cool until firm: 1 hour in refrigerator or about 30 minutes in freezer. Place onto a flat area and peel off the foil. Cut into small squares. If desired, lightly press sprinkles into each piece.

“It is good to still be thankful for your life and to know that foster care is only a temporary state. You will eventually be able to make all of the decisions on your own when it comes to the holidays. I always try to remember that it will eventually be over; that’s the one thing that kept me going when I was in care.”

— FosterClub member Bregetta, age 23, from Wisconsin, in foster care 6 years



tip #8 You’ll make it

Everyone appreciates a homemade gift. Consider making holiday ornaments, knitting scarves, or crafting bookmarks. Search the internet for ideas and instructions about making inexpensive holiday crafts. Most everyone loves homemade cookies or candies wrapped in pretty boxes. And in case you are interested, FosterClub’s address is 753 First Avenue, Seaside, OR 97138. ;)

tip #9 Visit others who may feel alone

Older people in a retirement or nursing home may be away from loved ones during the holidays. Check with them or a local hospital to find out if there are people who would enjoy having company during the holidays. Consider bringing a favorite holiday story to read aloud or load your iPod with a favorite Christmas song (you may have to explain how you got the song in there!).

tip #10 Connect at FosterClub.com

Be sure to visit the FosterClub message boards at www.fosterclub.com and connect with your peers who may be feeling the same way. Post your feedback to an article written by a FosterClub AllStar at www.fosterclub.com/topics/kidslkeme.cfm. Let us know how you spend the holidays and give your own ideas about how to find your own joy during the season.

“I would say that better days are ahead, you may have lost your biological family but you gain so many more brothers and sisters through foster care to share your time with.”

— FosterClub member Anthony, age 25, from Georgia, in foster care over 11 years





About FosterClub

FosterClub is the national network for young people in foster care. For more than 513,000 children living in the foster care system across the country, childhood has been interrupted by abuse, neglect or abandonment. FosterClub is their club — a place to turn for advice, information, and hope. Our members are resilient young people determined to build a better future for themselves and for other kids coming up through the system behind them. Learn more about FosterClub or how you can support young people in foster care at www.fosterclub.org or by calling 503-717-1552.

FosterClub :: giving kids in foster care a new spin on life

Pictured above: FosterClub All-Stars hang out in downtown Portland during their summer internship. Join them on the FosterClub message boards at www.fosterclub.com



“If you are sad or anxious about the holidays, just try to fully embrace the family you are with. Try to embrace their traditions and ways of doing things, you might enjoy yourself. It is ok to miss your family, try to get some contact with them. Just try to have fun and enjoy the things that you will be doing.”

— Deborah Hassan, age 19,
from Montana, in foster care over 13 years

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You = Change.

We all equal change. That's why FosterClub is here. We are young, and we are growing, and we are changing our world. We want you to join us.

FosterClub is an ambitious group of resilient young people, empowered by fantastic support from adults who believe in them. We are people who care, working hard, to connect people, make families, and create opportunity.

This we guarantee: Your donation will be well used - leveraged to the fullest extent possible - and serve as a catalyst to young people determined to change life for kids in foster care.

FosterClub
753 First Avenue
Seaside, OR 97138

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in foster care

P.S. If you are a youth, we aren't suggesting you raid your piggy bank! But we do ask that you hit up your friends in high places to support the work that FosterClub does. LOL!

For more information, call 503-717-1552

Please make checks payable to FosterClub. All gifts are tax-deductible to the extent allowable by law. FosterClub is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. Thanks for your help!