

Christmas in Foster Care

As we approach the upcoming holidays, I am reminded how this time of year can be especially difficult for children in foster care.

I remember Christmas Day as a child in care; my sister and I (both in the same placement) would race to the tree to see if Santa brought us everything we wanted. After we demolished the living room, I'd look around and see everyone laughing and having a good time. But inside, I felt that I didn't belong and all I wanted was to be at home with my family. I'd head to my room, wondering what my mom and brother were doing. Were they thinking of me? I knew I missed Christmas at home with them.

Sadly, no one in my foster home knew (or publicly acknowledged) that I was struggling with these feelings. My foster parents never talked to me about my biological family, nor did they ask how I used to celebrate the holiday with my family. I believe those conversations were never held because the professionals in my life feared what could come of them. Would I start misbehaving? Would it make me sad? Starting this conversation with me could have opened the door to a more meaningful relationship. It may have helped me open up about how I was feeling inside.

As professionals in the foster care system, we have a responsibility to the children in our care to recognize -- and acknowledge -- each child's history. We should help children embrace their identity by recognizing their past as an important part of who these children are.

So, where do you start? Here are a few examples you can use this holiday season:

- Don't assume that a child celebrates Christmas.
- Find out what traditions the child had in his/her home and incorporate one or two into your celebration (with their permission). Even if you have a number of foster children in your home, this is possible with little work.
- Start a new tradition and explain how they are a part of it.
- Share stories of previous Christmases.
- Document the night with pictures and create a scrapbook for the child to take with them.
- If it is OK with the treatment team and court, allow the child to call his/her parent(s) and sibling(s).
- Treat each child the same in your home, regardless of whether the child is a biological or foster child.

In my house, we pick a night to hang ornaments on the tree, listen to Christmas music and decorate the living room with knick-knacks. At the end of the night, when everything is ready, my children climb to the top of the ladder and gently put the Christmas Angel on the tree. These are memories that we'll all share forever.

Remember, no matter what the reason was for the removal of a child from his/her biological family, the child has good memories, too. Let the child share them with you.

Happy Holidays,

Adam Robe

author of the Robbie Rabbit series

Greetings!

As many of you know, last month we celebrated adoption month by partnering with The Adoption Exchange Association and donating a portion of the proceeds for each Robbie Rabbit book purchased via our site.

It was such a successful month, that we're extending the promotion through December 2009!

For every Robbie Rabbit book or Robbie Reader purchased at www.robbietherabbit.com this month, Adam Robe (author of the Robbie Rabbit books) will donate a portion of the proceeds to The Adoption Exchange Association.

AEA serves its members by stimulating innovative solutions, eliminating barriers, advocating, educating, and sharing excellent practice. Its central goal is to assist and encourage its members nationwide as they find adoptive families for all children and youth who wait in foster care. More than 11,000 children previously featured on AEA's federally-funded website, www.adoptuskids.org, have been adopted.

Thanks for your support and efforts in helping children in foster care.

Your Friends at Robbie the Rabbit