

# Honoring Holiday Traditions

Christmas is right around the corner. But what if you don't celebrate Christmas and your foster children do? Or what if your children only celebrate Christmas as a secular holiday, and you celebrate it as a religious holiday? Or what if your children celebrate Hanukkah? Or what if you have ham and pecan pie, but your children are used to steak and chocolate pie? And do you open presents on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day? And what do you do if you don't believe in perpetuating the whole Santa Claus story, but your children have always believed in Santa Claus? And what does that ODJFS rule say, anyway? And does it matter?

Well, simply, yes, it does matter. For both of you. Traditions are an important part of family life, and sometimes they are rooted in our religious practices and beliefs. It is important that you are able to practice your family traditions. In the same way, your children may have some holiday traditions from their birth families that are important to them. How do you balance the two – honoring your beliefs and traditions as well as your children's? Here are some suggestions:



1. Acknowledge and accept the fact that there likely are at least some differences in your traditions and your children's birth family's traditions and beliefs. Don't ignore or minimize that fact.
2. Have a fun family meeting where you ask your children to share some of the holiday traditions that are important for them to have. This can span the spectrum from fun things like certain foods to certain religious practices.
3. Explain some of the traditions that you have every year which are important for you to continue.
4. Remember that some traditions can seem trivial, but are still important. For example, my family has tamales and sparkling apple cider every Christmas Eve. I don't know why, to be honest. But it's important to me because it's what we've done for at least the past 32 years.
5. Incorporate the traditions together, if possible. If one of your children absolutely must have peanut butter pie in order for Christmas to be complete, then add it to the buffet table alongside your famous pecan pie.



6. Be respectful and honoring, and expect your children to be equally respectful and honoring of your practices. When my wife and I married, I discovered with much shock and horror that her family dresses up at holiday gatherings. My family of origin is sweat pants and robes, and a shower every couple of days if you're lucky. So when we are with her family at the holidays, I am on my best behavior with a clean shaven face and dress pants. When we are with my family, she is on her best behavior with her pajamas and messy hair. That is how we respect each other's practices.

Create some new traditions! You may find that you really like some of the ideas your children have! Most importantly, have fun! God bless you this holiday!

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