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*for Adoptive Families*



## Ready or not, here they come!

Kimberly Waldie

Like it or not, the holidays have a way of creeping up on us. For an adoptive family, the holidays can bring even more stress as we navigate life with kids from hard places. But is there a way to enjoy this season with all its demands without giving way to a “Grinch” mentality?

### Prep work

Start by asking: Why do we do what we do? Many of us can’t even remember why we do certain traditions that drain us year after year. Traditions are about passing on what really matters to our family.

The year we adopted two of our four children, we desperately needed connections and happy memories to help us bond. I remember one woman sharing her view of our adoption: “It’s like baking a beautiful cake!” I didn’t say it at the time, but I felt more like we were all in the mixing bowl, being stirred and beaten relentlessly! Wherever you are in your adoption journey, the holiday traditions you set (or remove) can go a long way toward bringing your family together.

### Assembling all parts: old and new

All of us have a past—good, bad, or ugly. Whatever that past, it’s great to give every family member a voice. If fruitcake is a symbol of all that is good during the holidays to you, maybe you should have fruitcake!

If your child is reminded of a traumatic event by a holiday tradition, be aware of this. Recognize that healing can start just by giving them the freedom to speak about those

sad traditions to someone who loves and hears them.

Are there ways you can honor important traditions of your adopted child’s past? If your child was adopted internationally, can you mix in things from their birth country to celebrate the beauty they bring your family? If you have an open relationship with your child’s birth family, can you join them into a family tradition in a way that works well for your child?

Younger children may not have memories of past holidays. Creatively fill in the gaps together! I recently read the story of a parent who threw a special birthday party for her daughter celebrating all nine years of birthdays they never had together. Another parent shared how her elementary-age child was always curious about what he “wore as a baby,” so she bought him a special baby outfit and showed him how she would have dressed him if given the chance. What a wonderful gift to give your child!

Also important may be honoring your biological children (if you have them) and giving them a voice about those “before adoption” traditions that matter. In your excitement to bond your family, don’t overlook the pieces of the past they find important and need.

Once you’ve gone through the old traditions, it’s time to talk about new things you can do as a family. Often these discussions will be as memorable as the traditions that come out of them!

### Survival tips

Our son moved in the week before Easter. I went all out, setting up new, kid-friendly Easter traditions. Out of that

“Traditions touch us, they connect us, and they expand us.”

— Rita Barreto Craig

## Ready or not, here they come! continued

came our family's famous Easter scavenger hunt, which they loved. Each child was given an individual set of clues to find their Easter basket. Unfortunately, it was a lot of work every Easter Sunday to pull off before leaving for church. As they grew older, my clues had to grow more complex. I was relieved when they outgrew Easter baskets!

### I learned a few things that may help you

Consider the child. If the tradition makes no sense, overstimulates a child who can't self-regulate, or leaves them (or you) frustrated and irritable, let it go.

Consider your family. It's easy in the spirit of the holidays to overcommit. Just because you can doesn't mean you should. Be creative with ideas but give yourself permission to consider what's best for your immediate family. This may give you some free space to enjoy the holidays instead of just trying to survive them.

Consider the future. Do you want to be doing this tradition every year while your children are home? If doing it creates financial stress, is it really worth it and reasonable in the long run?

### What's important to your family?

When it's all said and done, decide what you want your kids to remember about your family and the times you've spent together during the holiday seasons. My children still laugh about how crazy mom got on Easter morning and the ridiculous places she hid those baskets! For me, these memories are glue that holds our family together long after the kids have grown up and gone.



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All three Post-Adoption Resource Centers have many family fun events planned, as well as support groups and trainings. Please check your Post Adoption Resource Center region's Facebook page or website, watch for monthly calendars, or give us a call to find out what is available near you.

### REGION 2

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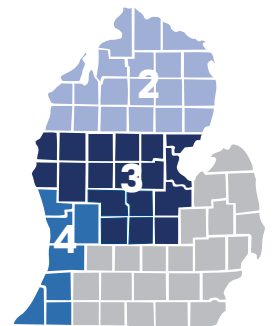
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[postadoptionrc.org](http://postadoptionrc.org)

Other suggested websites: [adoptivefamilies.com](http://adoptivefamilies.com) [adoptioninstitute.org](http://adoptioninstitute.org)