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Exploring and developing our promise of a permanent family for every child.

WHAT DO YOU THINK? ©

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TOPIC: HOLIDAYS AND BOUNDARIES: USING THE PERENNIAL HOLIDAY DILEMMA TO ADVANCE PERMANENCE FOR YOUTH IN GROUP SETTINGS.

IDEAS: It is especially difficult for us to see children and young adults who have no family with whom to share the joys of the season. However, introducing our clients to our personal family joys and celebrations can be stressful for the youth as well. She/he may fantasize that our families are the perfect alternative for him or her. He or she may feel the lack of family more keenly as a result of this experience. And after the holiday, this visit will change the youth's relationship with the staff person.

DISCUSSION: Holidays are a difficult time for many people. For children in our care who have no place to celebrate the holidays this is especially true. Seeing the picture-book joy of holiday stories portrayed in the media, our clients often find the season depressing and stressful. They may see their lives in sharp contrast with the way things "ought to be". The shame that many feel about not being "home" is exacerbated by the unreal images of family harmony in holiday pictures and touching stories. Being mindful of the goal to ensure a permanent family for every child; programs can encourage staff to bring children home to share their holidays under the following conditions:

1. Discussion of the plan, the logistics and clearance with the staff member's program manager must all be accomplished prior to discussing the prospects with the child.
2. The child is always free to refuse
3. As a consequence of introducing the child to family, the staff assumes the additional responsibility (along with his/her normal duties at the agency) of working directly with the family recruitment staff and/or clinical staff to develop a permanent alternative family for the youth.
4. Such responsibility shall include, but not be limited to reviewing the youth's record for past connections, discussing past connections with the youth, escorting the youth to family recruitment events, disseminating information about the agency's program in the community, and other tasks as necessary to assist the youth in securing a permanent family of his/her own.

At the base of this policy is the conviction that we all need to provide family connections for the youth in our care in every season regardless of our positions, but we must do it for them and not for our own comfort.

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