

In the Loop

Holiday Survival

By Sheila Webster, MA in Marriage and Family Counselling

Holiday times are stressful times in any home and good stress can take as big a toll on your physical body as negative. For foster, adoptive, or kinship families, holiday times often multiply stress for everyone involved.

Here is one former child-in-care story written by a young mother of four who is now 26. She reflects back on a Christmas when she was about 14.

“I can’t speak for every child’s first Christmas in care, but mine was less than ideal. I had been placed in a home, and less than a week later, due to circumstances beyond my control, I was moved. It was only two or three days before Christmas, and I can still vividly remember the rejection and subsequent devastation I felt.

“Christmas is supposed to be a joyous, hopeful time. A chance to connect with family, exchange gifts and eat multiple plates of delicious food, and here I was being passed around like a soccer ball on the field. If I couldn’t belong in the first home I had

been placed in...what hope was there for me?”

Early on in my home this child described what it was like to receive presents from the family. Presents that had clearly been meant for someone else. She also described the glares she received from the other kids in the home. This seemingly sullen child tried to participate, but everything in her body screamed for her to be able to go to her room and just be left alone to cry.

“In retrospect while I can certainly understand that for many reasons, a certain child isn’t a good fit for a particular home, the children that come into your home more than likely feel out of place and alone enough as it is.

“I feel that more care should have been taken to handle the situation in a delicate manner. The Christmas season is not an ideal time to uproot a child who already feels alone in the world. Maybe it seems pointless to spend that one holiday with him or her, but you can’t gauge the difference it will

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Submissions for next newsletter are due by January 31, 2015

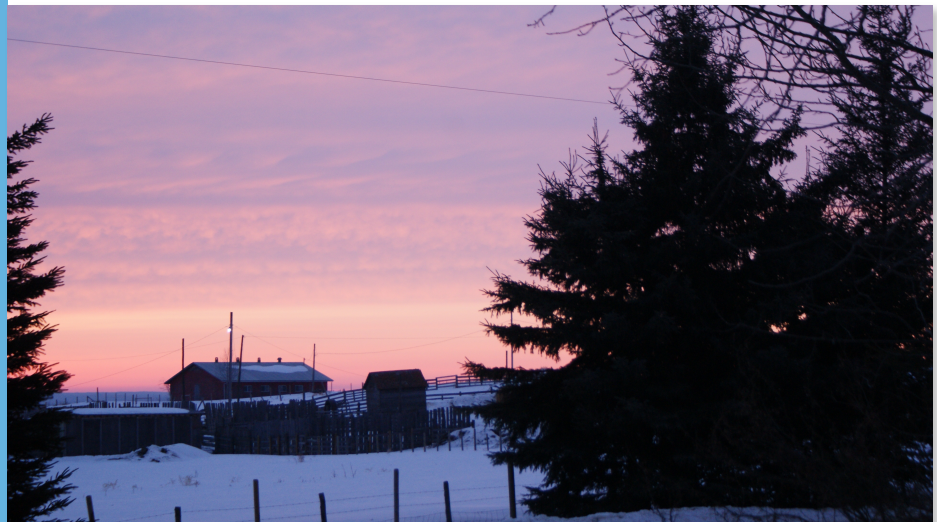
Please submit your articles or pictures on spring and camp opportunities.

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**NORTH CENTRAL ALBERTA
CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES**



“Any celebration meal to which guests are invited, be they family or friends, should be an occasion for generous hospitality.”

-Julian Baggini



Holiday Survival (Continued from page 1)

make in his or her sense of self.

Waiting for a more opportune time, even a few days after Christmas, could make all the difference to that child and his or her emotional stability as the child moves forward to a new home.”

TIPS for handling Your Stress –

- ◆ Downscale your expectations of the season and leave room for normal living.
- ◆ Drink less caffeine and more water
- ◆ Set a budget – and stick to it
- ◆ Look for presents that are heartfelt and meaningful. A present like a framed picture of some special occasion, a coupon book for time together, a special towel and housecoat, a team sweater... Look for things that call out the individuality of that child even if they have been there for one day.
- ◆ Have extra thoughtful things on hand for last minute gifts – Tim Horton’s Cards, homemade gift basket of holiday teas or hot chocolate and mugs, cans of homemade cookies, gift cards for bookstores or unique shops, bath baskets, soft blankets, stuffed animal, backpack with special items, board games and books.
- ◆ Be realistic about whether your home can successfully include another child last minute over the holidays.

TIPS for handling Their Stress -

- ◆ Many children cannot navigate the triggers and emotions of the season away from their family of origin. They need extra time and help to succeed at this time of year.
- ◆ Ask what one special food you could make for them for the holiday table and make it even if it is bannock or macaroni and cheese
- ◆ Have some small stocking items that this child can choose to give as presents to the other kids – if they are at an age where they want to pay for their own stuff make a simple chore chart to ‘pay’ for the items
- ◆ Make a special card with them for their family and perhaps a small gift basket with items the child would like to give them that are appropriate (schools often have a white elephant sale around Christmas for students to get their parents a gift.
- ◆ Have snacks, a cuddly blanket and special movies available for holiday friendly ‘time outs’

Sheila Webster has biological, foster, kinship and adopted children in her life. As a marriage and family counsellor, her experience of over 24 years helps her understand the diversity in families. She also enjoys six grandchildren and a writing career.

Regulatory Changes: Support and Financial Assistance Agreements

By Eldon Block, Director

♦ On July 22, 2014, as a part of its commitment to implement the Child Intervention Five-Point Plan, the Ministry of Human Services has made regulatory amendments to extend the eligibility age of youth receiving services from 22 to 24 years of age. This change is being implemented to help improve the transition to adulthood and the outcomes for youth in care.

♦ The amendments extend the age of services to 24 years of age for young adults receiving services and support through Support and Financial Assistance Agreements (SFAA's), Voluntary Service Agreements (VSA's) and the Advancing Futures Bursary program. Services generally provided to this age group include financial supports, referrals/advocacy and an ongoing connection with a caseworker.

Impacts to Policy and Practice:

♦ Reports of death and serious injuries of young adults up to 24 years of age will be made to the Statutory Director. The OCYA's current legislation provides for advocacy services for young adults up to the age of 22. For this reason, we will continue to report to the OYCA on death and serious injury for young adults up to 22 years of age.

♦ Policy 5.2.6 Support and Financial Assistance Agreements (SFAA)—Intervention has been changed. Supervisory approval is no longer required to enter into an SFAA with a young adult. Instead, supervisory approval will now be required if the young adult does not wish to enter into an SFAA upon turning 18 years of age. Whenever a SFAA is entered into with a young adult, the reason for the application and the young adult's current circumstances must be documented in the contact log. The completion of a Safety Assessment record is not required for an SFAA.

♦ Caseworkers will invite each eligible young adult (those receiving services up to their 18th birthday) to sign an SFAA on their 18th birthday. Should an eligible young adult refuse to sign an SFAA on their 18th birthday, caseworkers will inform them of their right to apply for an SFAA any time between their 18th and 24th birthday.

Attention Caregivers: The Caregiver Conference Registration Committee is requesting copies of family photos of you and your children together. The Registration Committee is hoping to put together some collages and a Powerpoint presentation which will be shown at the next Caregiver Conference. Please email a copy of your favourite family photo to nadine.majeau@gov.ab.ca or send a hard copy photo to Nadine at the Edson CFS at #100-111 — 54th Street, EDSON, AB T7E 1T2 (please label the back of your photo with your full name if you wish to have the photo returned).



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“People don’t notice whether it’s winter or summer when they’re happy.”

-Anton Chekhov

Choosing Adoption

Anonymously Posted on Social Media (Names have been changed)



“Every gift which is given, even though it be small, is in reality great, if it is given with affection.”

-Pindar

This will be the best ever festive season for Hannah Gallagher and husband Alistair as they celebrate Santa’s first visit with their recently adopted children. Lifting her young children up so they could put sparkling decorations in place on the Christmas tree, the joy in Hannah Gallagher’s face is plain to see and she beams with delight at her husband Alistair. Christmas is special for all parents, but for the Gallaghers* this one promises to be truly magical. They are preparing for Santa to deliver presents for five-year-old daughter Lucy* and four-year-old son James* for the first time in their home. Selflessly Hannah and Alistair decided not to have their own biological children and instead offer a loving home to vulnerable youngsters in need of parents. In March, they adopted James and Lucy.

Secondary school teacher Hannah, 28, says it was something she felt compelled to do, especially as her own mum and brother were adopted. It’s been an emotionally challenging journey but as they prepare for their first Christmas together, simply sharing the children’s excitement makes everything feel worthwhile. “It’s been the most wonderful, life-changing year and Christmas is going to be a real high point,” she says. “Seeing your children’s faces on Christmas morning, helping them prepare for the day, is an absolute privilege and we can’t wait to share that with them. “Our children have had some difficult times in the past and we want to help them create positive memories they’ll be able to treasure. “They’ve loved helping us put the tree up – they were so excited that we did that in November! “Since then, we’ve had candles, advent calendars and lots more decorations put up. “On the day itself we’re planning to open our presents, go to church then have a big family meal. It’s the kind of Christmas Alistair and I have looked forward to for a long time. “We’ve

been through so much to get here that we really will appreciate every minute of it.” She and graphic designer Alistair, 29, have been together 10 years and married for six, and they always knew they wanted a family. While many parents choose to adopt after struggling for years to conceive, Hannah and Alistair – motivated by their desire to provide a stable home to children in need – put plans for biological children on hold, perhaps forever. Hannah’s own family background had made her very familiar with the value of adoption. “We chose adoption first, before even trying for birth children. It wasn’t something we did lightly. “Alistair and I spent a long time talking about it and we were both completely agreed that our priority was helping children who needed a home. “It might seem strange to some people but it made perfect sense to us, it was about doing something valuable,” she says.

“The vast majority of people come to adoption after struggling with infertility but because we’d already been exposed to adoption through my family we had seen how wonderful it could be to take a child out of a desperate situation and place them in a loving family.” Hannah’s mum Sabrina was adopted when she was 10 after her parents split up. Hannah says: “My parents had myself, my sister Fazane and brother Joseph then adopted my youngest brother, Joshua, so I was very aware of how adoption could work and how important it was. “As we grew up, my parents talked very openly about the process and I remembered them bringing my brother home. “I knew how families could be made in different ways. I wanted to do the same. Adoption is a wonderful route to having a family for childless couples, single parents and couples who are able to have and may already have birth children, like my parents. Loving families do come in all shapes and sizes and we are proud to be one of them – and proud of being given the chance to adopt.”

Bed Bugs

Bed bugs are on the rise in some parts of Alberta and it is important that we are all educated to best reduce the risk of infestation or spread. Although bedbugs are far from the biggest pests in the province, they are persistent and can live for a year without food. They are also very good at hitching a ride from place to place.

It is important to know that bed bugs can be present no matter how clean or messy your house is, because they only feed on blood. Once the bugs have found a source to feed on they will stay very close by, which is why they are usually found in bedrooms. The best time to see if you have bed bugs is at night because this is generally when they come out to feed. People can have bed bugs in their home unknowingly, because the bed bugs can be carried in on clothing, bedding, and even luggage. Below are some helpful links with more information on how to determine if you have bed bugs, how to clean up after bed bugs, and ways to prevent them from coming into your home. If you have determined that you have bed bugs, it is imperative that you contact a professional exterminator immediately, rather than trying to deal with them on your own, because doing so could spread the problem further throughout your home.

For more information:

<http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/3426.asp>

<http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/Advisories/ne-pha-2010-12-21-bedbug-clean-up-prevention.pdf>

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/bedbugs/basics/causes/con-20026119>

<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/alberta/Pages/How-do-i-inspect-for-bed-bugs.aspx>

Holiday Craft Ideas

- ◆ 10 Frugal Homemade Gifts <http://momlaughs.blogspot.ca/2008/09/ten-fantastic-frugal-homemade-fall.html>
- ◆ 20 Minute Thumbprint Ornaments <http://www.littlebitfunky.com/2011/11/20-minute-crafter-reindeer-thumbprint.html>
- ◆ DIY Christmas Calendar Made from Upcycled Kitchen Roll Tubes <http://www.coffeeandvanilla.com/cardboard-tubes-christmas-calendar/>
- ◆ DIY popsicle stick ornaments - plus a tree topper too. <http://blog.chickabug.com/2012/12/popsicle-stick-ornaments.html>
- ◆ Frosty Fingers Handprint Ornament <http://www.betterbudgeting.com/christmasornaments08/handprintornaments.htm>
- ◆ Olaf Snowman Pin <http://family.disney.com/crafts/olaf-snowman-pin>
- ◆ Stained glass ornaments <http://www.teachkidsart.net/christmas-cheer/>

“It doesn’t bother me a bit when people say, ‘Merry Christmas’ to me. I don’t think they are slighting me or getting ready to put me in a ghetto. In fact, I kind of like it.”

-Ben Stein



Worker Profile: Margaret LaChance

“All the best parts of art come from pain turned to celebration.”

-Natalia Kills



Margaret LaChance is passionate about the foster parents that she works with.

“They are all special because of what they do. Some of our foster parents connect with their kids forever – some even become grandparents.”

Margaret is the Foster Care Support Worker for the Edson Office of North Central Alberta Child and Family Services.

“I returned to Foster Care because it’s a good place to be – it’s my niche.”

Margaret has been a social worker for 18 years and started working in Foster Care when she was in Wetaskawin. She came back to foster care after a four year hiatus as a Generalist in Grande Cache.

She notes that the foster care she sees in Edson now is very different than what

was happening in Wetaskawin five years ago. Kinship care has become a priority option and Margaret sees this as a promising direction.

“It’s a good thing for the kids because if they are with their family, it’s someone they know.”

Margaret considers working with people who open their homes and their lives to vulnerable children a privilege.

“It’s so wonderful to meet such amazing parents and to get to watch these kids blossom under their care.”

Margaret has five children, four grandchildren and one great grandchild. She lives in Edson and enjoys a laid back lifestyle – walks, knitting and long soaks at Miette Hotsprings.

Recipes and other Ideas

- ◆ 10 Creative Ideas for Holiday Centerpieces <http://www.realsimple.com/holidays-entertaining/holidays/holiday-centerpieces>
- ◆ 33 Christmas Table Settings & Centerpieces <http://www.countryliving.com/cooking/entertaining/christmas-tables-1208#slide-1>
- ◆ Christmas 360 (Recipes that will inspire anyone to cook healthy meals) www.ricardocuisine.com/theme/christmas/
- ◆ Christmas recipes from Canadian Living www.canadianliving.com › Recipe Directory › Holiday and Special Events
- ◆ Simple Christmas Centerpieces <http://www.bhg.com/christmas/indoor-decorating/simple-christmas-centerpieces/>
- ◆ Winter entertainment for kids <http://www.skymetweather.com/content/2013/12/lifestyle-and-culture/winter-entertainment-for-kids/>

Stressed or Soaring?

By Ruth L. Snyder

As a parent of five children ages 6 to 17, I'm always busy. However the past few weeks have had extra stressors:

- ◆ Negotiating a contract and starting new music classes
- ◆ Rehearsing and performing in our church dinner theatre
- ◆ Launching a new booklet: Uplifting Devotionals for Parents -available from Amazon
- ◆ Attending appointments to get new hearing aids and FM equipment fitted for our youngest daughter

Individually, these are all things I enjoy doing. However, the combination resulted in overload. I noticed my stress affecting me in the following ways:

- ◆ Difficulty thinking clearly
- ◆ Craving (and eating) more sugar and chocolate
- ◆ Having to consciously slow myself down when driving
- ◆ Feeling tired when I woke up in the morning
- ◆ Being easily annoyed by things that don't usually bother me

We are all stressed out by different things. The important thing is to recognize what stresses us and know how we can reduce our stress so that we only live with it short term. Otherwise, stress can have drastic consequences on our health and relationships with other people. Here are some things that help me when I'm stressed:

- ◆ Focus on breathing deeply. (I tend to take shallow breaths when I'm stressed.)
- ◆ Take a walk outside
- ◆ Make time to enjoy nature (Sunrises and sunsets are my favorite.)
- ◆ Sit down and enjoy a hot drink (A glass of water with lemon is good too, but a hot drink forces me to slow down)
- ◆ Wait for 10 minutes when you feel like snacking (Sometimes waiting helps me realize I'm not really hungry.)
- ◆ Look at your schedule and work at carving out some "white space" on your calendar
- ◆ Make sure you have quiet time, even when your life is busy.
- ◆ Sing or play your favourite instrument (Music is a great stress reliever.)
- ◆ Get extra rest/sleep if possible
- ◆ Make time to do something you enjoy (read a book, go skating, make a craft, etc.)
- ◆ Have a relaxing bath (Make sure someone is available to look after your children!)
- ◆ Give someone a hug

For more information:

Stress Symptoms, Signs, and Causes: The Effects of Stress Overload and What You Can Do About It. <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/stress-symptoms-causes-and-effects.htm>

*"In our work
and in our
living, we
must
recognize that
difference is a
reason for
celebration
and growth,
rather than a
reason for
destruction."*

-Audre Lorde



*“In seed time
learn, in
harvest teach,
in winter
enjoy.”*

-William Blake



Are you prepared for Winter?

Adapted from Winter Weather Preparedness www.losalamosnm.us

Dress for the Weather

- ◆ Wear several layers of loose fitting, lightweight, warm clothing rather than one layer of heavy clothing. The outer garments should be tightly woven and water repellent.
- ◆ Wear mittens, which are warmer than gloves
- ◆ Wear a hat

Prepare your home and family

- ◆ Caulk and weather strip doors and windows
- ◆ Install and check smoke detectors
- ◆ Have an emergency plan in place
- ◆ If you are going away, get someone to check your home daily
- ◆ Know how to shut off water valves (in case a pipe bursts)
- ◆ Replace the filters on your furnace regularly

Prepare your car

Check or have a mechanic check the following items on your car:

- ◆ Antifreeze levels
- ◆ Battery and ignition system
- ◆ Brakes
- ◆ Exhaust system
- ◆ Fuel and air filters
- ◆ Heater and defrost system
- ◆ Lights and flashing hazard lights
- ◆ Oil
- ◆ Thermostat
- ◆ Windshield wiper

Winter emergency kit for your vehicle:

- ◆ shovel
- ◆ battery powered radio
- ◆ snack food
- ◆ first aid kit with pocket knife
- ◆ tow rope
- ◆ emergency flares
- ◆ windshield scraper
- ◆ matches
- ◆ flashlight
- ◆ water
- ◆ extra hats, scarves, and jackets
- ◆ blankets
- ◆ booster cables



Kids These Days: Celebrating Caregivers

by Dr. David Rideout, Regional Director



During a very enjoyable career that now spans over three decades, I've had the privilege of working for thousands of children and teenagers. I recall with great fondness the many young people who skipped, dawdled, scurried, trudged or sauntered into my classroom when I was a teaching principal in the 1980s. Every one of those youth so vastly different—and yet, in some ways so similar.

One thing I observed over the years, both in my classrooms and in my own family, is that all children need the same basic elements to survive and to thrive. They need food, shelter and clothing, of course, and they need to be safe. They need to belong somewhere and to someone. They also need caring adults to help nurture and guide them - and believe in them.

For some children, those very basic necessities are not always available. These are the ones who come into the care of the child protection system. They are often vulnerable and wounded, coming from a place of trauma or tragedy. Many of them are victimized by neglect, physical abuse, sexual exploitation, family violence, or substance abuse. Sometimes their very lives are at risk and for their own safety, they must be removed from their home.

Who cares for these vulnerable children when their family is unable or unwilling to look after them? In many cases, it is a foster or kinship family—that is, extended family members who step up to help. Foster and kinship families are the extraordinary people who open their heart and their home to children and youth in crisis—often without time to prepare since crises can happen without warning. These caring individuals offer a safe place, a warm bed, a nutritious meal and a caring heart. Foster or kinship families can be a lifeline in those situations, helping a child to learn to trust again, love and be loved.

Every child needs a family and helping children return to their biological family is always the first aim. Foster families can be the bridge to maintain that connection, working with biological families while they address the issues that brought their children into care. In addition to meeting emotional and physical needs, foster families understand and support children's cultural, spiritual and familial ties so that in the best case scenario, these children can eventually return to their family and to their roots.

A child's stay in a foster home may be for a few days, weeks, months or even years, but the relationships forged between a child and foster or kinship parent can last a lifetime. When youth in care graduate high school, their foster parents are usually there to cheer them on. Many a foster father has walked a young bride down the aisle.

I've been privileged to meet many of these families in my current role as Regional Director of North Central Alberta Child and Family Services. It is always a highlight for me to celebrate our caregivers, observing firsthand their selfless dedication and the positive impact

they make on the lives of children in their care. I invite you to join me in extending a heartfelt thanks to all of them.

Dr. David Rideout is a former teacher, principal, and school board superintendent. He is a father of two adult sons and the *Regional Director of the North Central Alberta Child and Family Services*. Feedback or comments are welcome and can be sent via email to: david.rideout@gov.ab.ca

“Winter is a season of recovery and preparation.”

-Paul Theroux



Book Review

by Ruth L. Snyder

The Lamb-a-roo by Diana Kimpton, illustrated by Rosalind Beardshaw.

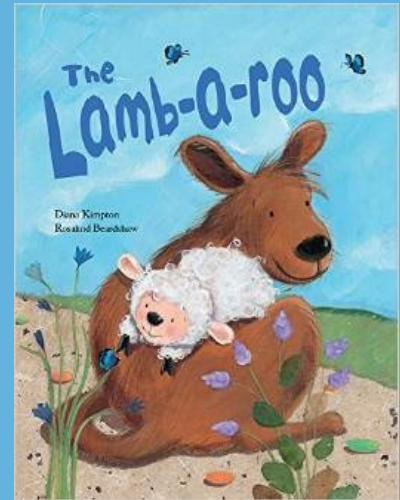
I happened across this book the other day while I was shopping. It's a delightful little tale which will amuse, but also provide opportunities to discuss adoption issues with your children.

The lamb is alone and needs a Mama. The kangaroo has everything, except a baby... until she finds the lamb. The lamb feels safe and loved, but he begins to notice that he's different - he doesn't have smooth brown fur and he can't jump like the rest of his family.

The lamb works hard at becoming more like his family members. Mama works hard at making sure the lamb fits in. But this just causes more problems for both of them. You'll have to read the book to find out how they resolve the problem.

Although this book addresses the adoption of an infant who looks different from his adoptive family, the story will be useful for anyone who is working through adoption issues. The picture book format lends itself to many different possibilities - reading the book to a child, a child reading the book independently, or even sitting down as a family and reading the book together. Perhaps you want to purchase a few copies to give as gifts to other families who are dealing with the same issues.

The Lamb-a-roo is available for purchase from Amazon, Chapters, Indigo or your favourite book store. (I found my copy at Extra Foods.)



“Love overcomes difference in this bouncy picture book tale.”



Names: _____ new membership renewal

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City/Province: _____ Agency Foster Family

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Membership fee: \$25.00 - Membership Expires December 31st

Make cheques payable to *Northern 7 Regional Foster Care Society*