It's the most wonderful time of the year
With the kids jingle belling
And everyone telling you be of good cheer
It's the most wonderful time of the year. (Andy Williams)

For children in adoptive, foster and guardianship families, the holidays may not be the most wonderful time of the year. Rather, they may be filled with longing for birth family, traditions from previous home, foods and treats of past holidays. Additionally, holidays often trigger traumatic memories, driving your family’s celebration toward pandemonium instead of peace and joy.

This year’s holiday season is riding on the heels of COVID-19 and months of uncertainty, fear, tedium, loss of people and loss of routine. Andy Williams could not have imagined that 2020’s “Most Wonderful Time of the Year” would be caught in the center of a world-wide pandemic and for many, not so wonderful.

Here are a few tips:

1. **Practice patience during the pandemic.** Control what you can do and let go of the rest. Our way of being, pre-COVID-19, is not likely to return for quite some time, if ever. Masks, hand washing, sanitizers, and social distancing will help to stay us safe until the virus is under control. Some of you may be old enough to remember when we were not required to wear seatbelts (many vehicles didn’t even have them). There was much resistance to the new regulations, and complaints of loss of personal rights! Today, we understand that seatbelts really do keep us safe. Let’s view the 3 W’s in that light: Wear a mask, Wash your hands, Watch your distance.

2. **Help your children make peace, too.** Often, children are expected to go along, follow our rules and meet our expectations without explanation. Take time to let them know what’s going on and why. Answer their questions honestly, in an age appropriate manner. Encourage them to express their frustrations and fears. Empathize – no doubt you share many of them!
3. **Stay connected.** Social distancing is good, social isolation is not. Maintaining connections has been more complicated this year, and in some ways more important than ever. Find ways to meet safely in person following CDC guidelines and the 3-W’s. Meet in small groups (less than 10), preferably outside. Get creative: invite family members to a holiday picnic in place of Christmas dinner; bundle up with blankets and supply cookies and hot cocoa. Plan a virtual gathering: a holiday game night, caroling or family cookie baking. Plan to have fun together.

4. **Create new traditions.** Explore whether there are foods, decorations or traditions that your child remembers from her birth parents or former foster homes and find ways to integrate those into your family. Discover holiday traditions from around the world and incorporate one or two of those. Integrating their experiences along with new within your family will promote your child’s sense of value and belonging, and at the same time add richness to yours.

5. **Give your kids grace.** We have all been untethered from our sense of normality and safety. For children and youth who come to our families through adoption, this disconnect is far too familiar. Changes in routine, schooling, friendships and family, feelings of loss and insecurity are not new and may trigger negative emotions or behaviors. Take a deep breath. Respond with empathy and compassion. Give more hugs.

Pandemic fatigue is real. We are stressed, bored, unsure of when we will once again be able to gather safely with friends, travel to see family, enjoy a night at the movies, bowling or dining out. Step away from the news about the rise in cases and “worst case” predictions – you get it, it’s serious. Take time to refresh and rejuvenate – read a book, take a bubble bath. Breathe. Be intentional, lower your emotional temperature and your kids are likely to respond in kind. Look forward to next year when “…hearts will be glowing…” (and) “…when loved ones are near.”