

**The Meaning of the Holidays**

**for At-Risk Youth**

How do you feel around the holidays? Are you full of excitement, stressed out, anxious, a bit melancholy or a mixture of all of these emotions? What is your reaction to those feelings? Do you feel the need to give gifts and go to holiday parties or are you moody and avoid family and friends? These are all good questions to ask of yourself now that the holiday season has begun. It is important for us all to be aware of both our feelings and behaviors during this time of year so we are able to empathize with our youth. As you know, the youth FFY serves have all experienced some form of trauma at some point in their short lives. Such trauma may have been caused by an uninvolved parent, witnessing domestic violence, experiencing abuse and/or neglect, being placed in foster care, etc. All of which can lead to difficult feelings and changes in behavior during the holidays.

**Below are some helpful tips on how to approach the holidays with your youth:**

* **Expectations**…Look at your own expectations and be mindful that you are not putting them onto your youth.
* **Listen**…Meet with your youth and let them talk about how they feel during the holidays and why. Encourage them to let you know when they are feeling overwhelmed or anxious so you can talk through things.
* **Less is more**…Be careful that gift giving doesn’t become about you, but what your youth really needs. The best present is to be present! Spend time just hanging out or doing something fun in the community.
  + **Reasonable gifts to give:** a heartfelt letter**,** an ornament, Christmas candy, a framed picture of the two of you, or a card and a meal out (doesn’t have to be fancy or expensive).
* **Traditions**…Come up with new traditions for the holidays!
  + Volunteer in the community together
  + Go for a hike
  + Try a new restaurant together, something new and different for both of you

**Thank you for all that you do to better the lives of youth! We appreciate you!** **Note from Match Coordinators: The above topics are simply suggestions. We would love to hear about any fun and/or meaningful experiences you have with your youth to pass along to other mentors. As always, we are here to support you as you build your mentoring relationship. Please do not hesitate to contact us at 303.756.9285 if you have specific questions or just need additional ideas along the way.**