

ADOPTIVE PARENT SUPPORT

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

PREPARING FOR THE HOLIDAY SEASON



SEEING THE HOLIDAYS THROUGH THEIR EYES

What's Inside ?



Listen

Lesli A. Johnson, MFT, speaks about surviving the holidays as an adoptee. Lesli coaches us through some situations where we may feel triggered, and shares some practical steps we can take to practice mindfulness and self care.



Read

The holidays can be hard on kids from hard places. In this blog, explore how kids affected by the holidays may be more withdrawn, isolated, more irritable, or show signs of changes in behaviors. Using the "TIR Approach" can help parents navigate this with their kids.



Watch

In this short video, Lara Leon helps parents understand why certain dates on the calendar that should be fun and bring joy, can be triggering for adoptees. Understanding this can help parents prepare for making those days a little less confusing for the family.

- 1 Don't assume they are having fun, ask them.
- 2 Be available to talk if you sense something is wrong.
- 3 Practice empathy.
- 4 Let them "opt out" of something if they need to.
- 5 Form traditions specific to your family.
- 6 Avoid sensory overload and stick to routines.



SAFETY PLANNING FOR A TRAUMA-INFORMED HOLIDAY SEASON

Use the “SELF” Tool

When thinking about potential events and situations for your child, it is helpful to process them in four different domains.

- **“S” is Safety: physical, psychological, social, and moral safety.**
 - *When conflicts arise, it’s important to take time to talk with children and families about what might be making them feel unsafe or unsettled. Many children—and even adults—struggle to put their feelings into words, so creating intentional space for these conversations helps. By fostering a sense of safety and understanding during the holidays, adoptive children and teens are more likely to experience genuine joy despite their difficult circumstances.*
- **“E” is Emotional Management: recognizing and handling feelings without hurting one’s self or others.**
 - *Using a feelings wheel or emotions chart can help families build emotional awareness together. Start with simple emotions—like happy, sad, or mad—especially for younger children or anyone new to naming feelings. Making space to identify and accept emotions, even when they don’t align with what’s “expected,” supports a trauma-informed and compassionate holiday season.*
- **“L” is Loss: acknowledging and grieving past losses or traumas. This includes moving towards the future with the understanding that all change involves loss.**
 - *The holidays can stir feelings of loss and longing, especially for adoptees. This season often reminds us of who or what is missing—birth family, familiar traditions, or connections that have changed over time. For adoptees and their families, these emotions are valid and deserve acknowledgment. Creating gentle rituals—like lighting a candle, sharing memories, or simply talking about those feelings—honors these experiences and helps adoptees feel seen, supported, and understood during the holidays.*
- **“F” is Future: re-establishing the capacity for choice and engaging in new behaviors rather than repeating old patterns.**
 - *It’s important to remember that adoptees and their families have the power to create new traditions and memories that reflect who they are today—honoring the past while shaping their own future.*



Buzz Word: Triggered

What does it really mean?

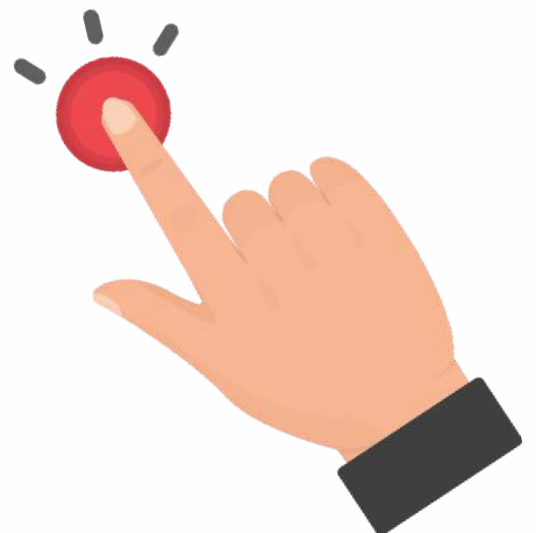
In counseling, the word “trigger” refers to the intense emotional distress you may feel suddenly when you’re faced with something that reminds you of a past traumatic experience. A trigger can cause someone to react as if the **trauma** were happening again.

All people have emotional triggers. Sometimes, we walk into, or are thrown into, experiences that can make us feel off (upset, angry, sad, frustrated, confused, embarrassed, panicked, or anxious). Triggers are the stimuli (events, situations, people, or things) that can push us into having strong emotional reactions. Triggers can be any type of sensory reminder like sounds, sights, smells, physical sensations, or they can be recurring dates and times (birthdays, anniversaries, holidays).

SIGNS YOU ARE FEELING TRIGGERED:

- The sudden onset of anxiety, panic, anger, sadness, fear, or overwhelm
- Feeling out of control
- Experiencing flashbacks
- Intrusive thoughts
- Feelings of abandonment or helplessness
- Physical symptoms like nausea, rapid heart rate, rapid shallow breathing, shakiness, dizziness

It is important to understand that a child who is triggered needs support and help in regulating themselves. They are not actively trying to disrupt what is going on with the family activities. Focus on making them feel safe and supported and consider completely removing them from the situation if possible.



What's the Plan?


The holidays come with a great deal of stimulation for all of our senses, which can be overwhelming to anyone, let alone our children who have experienced trauma and have overactive nervous systems constantly looking for signs of danger. Even children with the healthiest attachment can become overstimulated during the holidays and exhibit some difficult behaviors. Allow your expectations of the holidays to include that your child(ren) will have moments where their felt-safety is challenged, and you may need to adjust to meet their needs in those moments. Now that we have realistic expectations for the holidays, it is time to create a plan. Begin by asking these questions:

What sensations or experiences bring you and your child(ren) contentment and joy?

What experiences bring the most feelings of togetherness and connection?

What activities do you do together or separate that help calm your nervous systems?

Your and your child's answers will help you plan the types of activities that you will want to emphasize over the holidays. It may look different than your childhood traditions or even those of your close family members, but that is okay! Remember that flexibility, self-compassion, and realistic expectations are your greatest allies. By focusing on creating a supportive and understanding environment, filled with activities that bring joy and connection for your family, you're not just navigating the holidays; you're actively shaping positive memories for your family. Embrace the imperfect moments, cherish the genuine connections, and above all, celebrate the resilience and growth that each day brings.



Plan how you will respond if you start to notice dysregulation or plan an easy way to bow out of those activities in that moment and make a goal to stay a little longer next year. If you can, intervene before dysregulation becomes an emotional blow up. In moments of dysregulation, you can still praise them for how well they have done and give them the co-regulation they need to return to their felt safety and connection with you. ***This holiday season with your adopted children may not have Instagram worthy moments from beginning to end, but that's natural.***

Practical Tips:

- **Maintain routines:** Stick to familiar routines as much as possible to provide a sense of stability and security.
- **Prepare for questions:** Be prepared to answer questions about adoption in an age-appropriate and honest manner.
- **Create safe spaces:** Designate a quiet space where adopted children can take a break from the holiday hustle and bustle if needed.
- **Validate their feelings:** Let them know that their feelings are valid and that it's okay to have mixed emotions during the holiday season.
- **Encourage self-expression:** Provide opportunities for adopted children to express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences through art, writing, or other creative outlets.
- **Practice gratitude:** Cultivate a sense of gratitude by encouraging adopted children to reflect on the positive aspects of their adoption journey and the love they receive from their adoptive family.
- **Seek professional support if needed:** If you notice that your adopted child is struggling with their emotions or exhibiting signs of distress, consider seeking guidance from an adoption competent therapist.

Get Ready! November is National Adoptee Awareness Month



Each November, we observe National Adoption Awareness Month (NAAM), a time to raise awareness for those in need of a loving family and to celebrate adoption.

National Adoptee Awareness Month shifts this focus by highlighting adoptee voices. Doing so allows the adoptees to drive the narrative, acknowledging the lifelong impact of adoption and embrace both its challenges and joys.

All month long on The Park's [social media](#) and [blog](#), we're shining a spotlight on adoptee stories and experiences as part of the evolving conversation about adoption.

Through stories from our adoptee community about birth culture, family connections, and identity, we acknowledge the full spectrum of adoptee experiences. By sharing these experiences, we celebrate the resilience, creativity, and depth of the adoptee community, and create space for understanding, empathy, and connection for everyone.

