

# PARENTING IN PROGRESS

The journey of the imperfect  
parent

A Thoughtful Guide  
to Navigating the  
Holidays:

TRYING HARD - LOVING HARDER



# Foreword



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Hi, I'm Ed, and let's get one thing straight right off the bat: I'm not a psychologist, a child care expert, or a parenting guru. I'm just an imperfect adoptive parent figuring it out one day at a time.

Like most parents, I want to get it right as often as possible, but let's face it—parenting is messy, and adoption adds its own layer of complexity.

My goal is to document this journey honestly and build a community of parents, adopters, and adoptees along the way. Why? Because I want to be the best dad I can be and, at the same time, help minimize the longer-term challenges my kids might face as part of their adoption story.

I came to parenting a little later in life. I'm in my 40s, and my husband and I are raising our kids as a mixed-race, same-sex couple. He's from Asia; I'm from Ireland.

Our kids are mixed race, too, and our family is a patchwork of cultures, identities, and experiences. We're faking it until we make it—just like every parent I've ever met—and learning every day how to navigate this wild, wonderful, chaotic thing called family life.

What I've come to realise is that there's this huge pressure to get it perfect all the time, and it's exhausting. The truth is, good enough is exactly that—good enough. Parenting isn't about nailing it every moment of every day; it's about showing up, being present, and trying your best. That's what I want to remind myself and anyone else who might be feeling the weight of unrealistic expectations.

When I come across practical tips, tools, or approaches that work, I believe in sharing them. Gatekeeping doesn't help anyone, and the more we connect, the more we all grow. This isn't just about me sharing my story—it's about learning from each other, breaking down the idea of perfection, and building a community of support.

So, welcome to my imperfect parenting journey. It's honest, it's messy, and it's grounded in a whole lot of love. Together, let's figure it out, learn from one another, and create spaces where our kids—and us—can thrive.

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# Understanding the Emotional Landscape of the Holidays

The holidays are a time when emotions run high for everyone, but for adopted children, this period may evoke deeper questions and feelings.

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## HOW THE HOLIDAYS CAN IMPACT ADOPTED CHILDREN

Children in adoptive families may experience:

- A longing for their birth family or curiosity about how they celebrate.
- A sense of conflict between their birth and adoptive identities.
- A heightened awareness of their adoption story, especially if it contrasts with their current family's traditions.



# NAVIGATING BIRTH FAMILY AWARENESS



Acknowledging a child's birth family during the holidays is an important step toward fostering emotional resilience and understanding.

## Supporting Curiosity About Birth Families

- Encourage open conversations: "It's okay to think about your birth family. What do you imagine their holidays might look like?"
- Provide opportunities for connection if safe and appropriate, such as sending a card or lighting a candle in their honour.

## Age-Appropriate Conversations and Acknowledgements

Tailor your responses to your child's developmental stage. For younger children, keep explanations simple: "Your birth family loves you in their own way." Older children might appreciate deeper discussions about their adoption story.





# Birth Family Awareness and its Emotional Significance

Acknowledging birth families during the holidays can be complex but essential. Creating space for these thoughts and feelings can help children process their emotions in a safe and supported environment.



**"DO THEY  
CELEBRATE  
THE HOLIDAYS  
LIKE WE DO?"**

This might involve setting aside quiet moments to talk openly, listening without judgment, and validating their experiences.



**"IS MY BIRTH  
FAMILY  
THINKING  
ABOUT ME?"**

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Here are some thoughtful questions you can ask your child to create a safe space for them to explore and share their feelings during the holidays:



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**"What's your favorite part of the holidays?"**

**"Do you ever wonder what your birth family does for the holidays?"**

**"If you could plan the perfect holiday day, what would it look like?"**

**"Are there any traditions you think your birth family might have had that we could try together?"**

**"How do you feel about the holidays this year?"**

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# Validating their Emotions

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**"Are there any feelings you've been having about your birth family that you want to share?"**

**"What do you think your birth family might be doing right now?"**

**"Do you think about your birth family more during the holidays?"**

## Building Connection and Reassurance

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**"What do you love most about the traditions we do together?"**

**"What's one thing we could do together to make this holiday special for you?"**

**"Do you feel comfortable talking about your birth family? Is there anything you'd like me to know?"**

**"Do you have any questions about your birth family or your adoption story?"**

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# Building Traditions That Foster Security and Joy

Traditions play a vital role in shaping family identity. For adoptive families, reimagining traditions to include all aspects of a child's story can foster belonging and joy.

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## RETHINKING HOLIDAY RITUALS FOR ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

Consider the emotional impact of common traditions:

- Replace "Elf on the Shelf" or "naughty/nice" lists with kindness-focused rituals.
- Create inclusive traditions like baking cookies together or decorating with personalised ornaments that celebrate your family's unique journey.

Incorporate elements from your child's birth culture into your celebrations:

- Serve traditional foods.
- Learn songs or stories from their heritage.
- Blend these with your family's existing traditions to create a meaningful, shared experience.



# Maintaining Psychological Safety

Psychological safety is crucial for all children, especially those navigating adoption.

## The Importance of Consistency and Routine

Holidays can disrupt routines, which may heighten anxiety. Maintain predictable schedules for meals, bedtime, and activities to create a sense of stability.



## Avoiding Conditional Messaging

Replace phrases like "Be good, or Santa won't come" with positive affirmations.

Focus on unconditional love and shared joy, rather than behavior-based rewards or punishments.



# Practical Tips for Managing Holiday Stress

The holidays can be overwhelming. Here's how to balance festive fun with emotional well-being:

## Balancing Festivities and Emotional Needs

- Limit the number of activities to avoid overstimulation.
- Set aside quiet time for relaxation and connection.

## Setting Boundaries with Extended Family

- Prepare responses for well-meaning but intrusive questions about adoption.
- Advocate for your child's emotional needs during family gatherings.



## Finding Balance Between Activities and Rest

- **Limit Commitments:** Choose only the most meaningful events and avoid overloading the calendar. This not only reduces stress for your child but also allows you to be present for the moments that matter most.
- **Build in Downtime:** Schedule quiet, unstructured time at home where your family can relax together—whether it's watching movies, reading, or simply playing games.
- **Recognise Overstimulation:** Pay attention to signs of overwhelm, such as irritability, withdrawal, or difficulty sleeping. Use these cues to adjust your plans.





# SELF-CARE FOR PARENTS

YOU CAN'T POUR FROM AN EMPTY CUP. THE HOLIDAYS DEMAND A LOT FROM PARENTS, SO IT'S CRUCIAL TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF AS WELL.

- **Delegate Tasks:** Don't hesitate to ask for help from your partner, friends, or relatives. Whether it's preparing food or organising events, shared responsibilities can ease the load
- **Set Realistic Expectations:** It's okay if not everything is perfect. Focus on the joy of connection rather than achieving picture-perfect moments.
- **Prioritise Your Own Well-Being:** Whether it's a quiet walk, the gym, or simply a hot cup of tea on your own, carve out time to recharge so you can show up fully for your family.

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# Closing Thoughts: Embracing the Messiness of It All

The holiday season is a time for joy, connection, and reflection—but it's also a time when the pressure to meet unrealistic expectations can creep in.

Social media, with its perfectly curated photos and glossy portrayals of family life, can make us feel like we're falling short. Don't listen to it. Don't get sucked into comparing your family, your traditions, or your parenting journey to an ideal that doesn't exist.

Life is messy. Adoption is messy. Parenting is messy. And that's okay. It's in the messiness—the imperfect moments, the trial-and-error, and the lessons learned along the way—that we find real meaning and connection.

Your family's story is uniquely yours, and there's no one right way to navigate the holidays. Whether you're building new traditions, honoring old ones, or figuring it all out as you go, what matters most is the love and care you bring to each moment.

So, let go of the idea of perfection. Embrace the beautiful chaos of parenting. And remember, you're not alone in this journey. Life is meant to be lived authentically, mess and all, because that's where the magic truly lies. From one imperfect parent to another: Happy Holidays. You're doing great.





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