

Cultural Differences to Expect When a Child Enters a Foster Home

Children enter foster care with established needs and ideas of who they are, including what to eat, what to wear, how and when celebrate, and how or whom to worship. Children benefit when foster parents are respectful, supportive, and affirming of these needs and their cultural differences.

Below are common ways cultural differences are experienced. We encourage parents to learn as much as they can about their child's culture and to work to maintain cultural practices.

Diet

Children may have food preferences based on what was eaten in their family and their community. There may even be strict requirements in their culture – often based on their religion – about what, when, and how much they eat.

Some cultures observe dietary laws prohibiting the consumption of certain foods. Fasting is practiced in many religions.

Discuss children's dietary preferences or restrictions with them and their social workers.

Dress

Children may wear clothing based on the styles popular in their culture. Cultural issues of modesty may be different than in the dominant culture and may require sensitivity by the foster parents. Some religions have ritual garments members are expected to wear.

Some youth may use their clothing choices to express their gender identity, and youth who are transgender may desire to wear clothing which matches their gender identity and not their biological sex. These children must be supported in wearing the clothes that affirm their gender identity and expression.

Consult with children and their social workers about children's clothing preferences or requirements. Discuss with children how they can respond to people who are curious about their clothing or cultural practices. Parents should be clear with children that it's their right not to respond at all if they do not want to.

Religion

Children may want to continue practicing their faith or beliefs and may need resources, understanding, support, time, and a flexible schedule in order to do it properly.

Some children may be from agnostic or atheistic families, who do not have a belief in God. Atheism and agnosticism are beliefs and families with those beliefs are different than families who have not practiced a specific religion or gone to a place of worship regularly, but still believe in God. There are children from families who believe in other higher powers but do not refer to them as “God.”

Learn more about a child’s religion by talking with the child and his or her religious advisor. Be flexible and accommodating to ensure continuation of a child’s faith and religious education.

Celebration/Observances

Helping children maintain their cultural celebrations and religious observances can enrich the experiences of the foster family.

There are many children whose families enjoy Christmas festivities and traditions. But other cultures may have different holidays that are essential to them, for example Ramadan (Muslim), Yom Kippur (Jewish), Kwanzaa (African American), Day of the Dead (Mexican, Latin American), and Diwali (Hindu). Also, LGBTQ children and family members of LGBTQ people may want to attend PRIDE events or celebrate during PRIDE month in June.