

FAMILY COMPASS

Alongside children and young people
on their mental health journey



Using PACE as a way of Being: A Reminder for the Holidays



PLAYFULNESS

- **Lighten the mood:** Use a gentle, storytelling tone of voice to defuse tense moments.
- **Make transitions fun:** Challenge your child to hop like a bunny or stomp like a monster when moving between activities.
- **Prioritise connection over perfection:** If a formal holiday schedule causes stress, toss it out. Opt for a cosy movie night instead.

ACCEPTANCE

- **Validate the feeling:** Accept all feelings, even if you cannot accept all behaviours.
- **Use validating phrases:** Say, "It makes total sense that you are feeling overwhelmed by all these loud people."
- **Separate the child from the act:** Say, "I love you, but I do not like that choice".
- **Validate their feelings:** Say, "It makes sense that you feel scared about this big party".
- **Avoid harsh labels:** Do not call your child "bad." Instead, say they are having a "hard time".



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CURIOSITY

- **Look beneath the surface:** Instead of asking "Why are you acting out, why did you do that, what are you thinking?" ask yourself, "I wonder what is making my child so worried right now?"
- **Ask reflective questions:** Say, "I wonder if the busy park/supermarket/play area felt a bit too big and loud for you today?"
- **Explore sensory triggers:** Look for what caused the upset, like too much noise or a change in routine. Offer guesses gently like, "I notice you are covering your ears. I wonder if the loud music is feeling too intense?"

EMPATHY

- **Stay calm:** Take a deep breath before you react. Your calm energy makes them feel safe.
- **See it through their eyes:** Understand that the frantic excitement or loud noises of the holidays can trigger trauma and nervous system overload. Equally the lack of structure can feel discombobulating so try to establish some level of predictable routine to offer consistency and safety
- **Provide physical comfort:** Sit beside your child, offer a soft blanket, or hold their hand while they process their big emotions.
- **Set up a safe space:** Create a quiet, calm zone in your home where your child can retreat when the holiday bustle gets to be too much.



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Summer Holiday Guide: Supporting Adopted Siblings



Transitions can be challenging for children with a history of trauma. This guide provides actionable strategies to help your family maintain a sense of safety, connection, and emotional regulation during the summer break.

ROUTINE

Structure provides safety. Maintaining predictable patterns helps lower anxiety when school structures are removed.

- **Anchor the day:** Keep consistent times for waking, meals, and bedtime to ground the daily rhythm.
- **Use visual timetables:** Display a simple visual calendar so children can see the plan for the day.
- **Preview transitions:** Talk through the next day's schedule the night before to reduce morning anxiety.
- **Keep a transition object:** Bring a familiar toy or comfort item from home when going on outings.

PLAY & CONNECTION

Play is a powerful tool for co-regulation and helps strengthen sibling relationships in a low-pressure way.

- **Prioritise outdoor movement:** Aim for daily fresh air to naturally regulate the nervous system.
- **Use heavy work games:** Engage in pushing, pulling, or carrying activities (like carrying a backpack) to provide calming sensory input.
- **Offer controlled choices:** Let each child choose between two pre-approved activities to give them a healthy sense of control.
- **Plan sibling-bonding activities:** Focus on cooperative games rather than competitive ones to reduce friction.



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PRO-ACTIVE REST

Unstructured summer days can be exhausting. Scheduled downtime prevents children from reaching a state of sensory overload.

- **Schedule mandatory downtime:** Block out a quiet hour every afternoon for reading, audiobooks, or solo play.
- **Recognise quiet cues:** Watch for signs of tiredness, such as zoning out or increased irritability, before a meltdown occurs.
- **Keep a sensory retreat:** Create a small, quiet corner at home with cushions and comforting items for self-regulation.

EMOTIONAL REGULATION

Behavioural changes are common during school holidays. View challenging behaviours as a sign of dysregulation rather than deliberate misbehaviour.

- **Practice co-regulation:** Stay calm and breathe deeply when a child is overwhelmed; your calm helps them settle.
- **Spot the triggers:** Notice if transitions, crowded spaces, or changes in plans spark defensive behaviours.
- **Expect regression:** Anticipate that children may act younger or lose skills during times of stress.
- **Protect one-on-one time:** Give each child 10 minutes of your focused, uninterrupted attention daily to reinforce safety.



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PARENTAL SELF-COMPASSION

Parenting siblings through transitions can be demanding! Caring for your own well-being is essential for supporting your children.

- Lower the expectations: Focus on connection and safety rather than creating a picture-perfect holiday.
- Simplify daily tasks: Choose easy, predictable meals and reduce non-essential household chores.
- Take micro-breaks: Step away for five minutes to breathe deeply when you feel your own stress levels rising.
- Lean on your support network: Arrange regular check-ins with supportive friends, family, or professional networks who understand family dynamics.



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Activity suggestions for the summer

BACKYARD FUN

- **Pitch a tent:** Have a backyard campout. Tell stories in the sleeping bags .
- **Dig in the dirt:** Plant a small garden. Let the children pick and plant the seeds.
- **Make art:** Paint rocks together. Use natural items to make pictures on the grass.

NATURE ADVENTURES

- **Go on a wonder walk:** Be curious on your walk. Say, "I wonder what lives under that rock? If you were an animal what would you be? Together, lets find as many coloured items as possible and make a rainbow with them when we get home.
- **Scavenger hunt:** Print a list of items to find in the park together
- **Have a picnic:** Pack a basket.



FAMILY BONDING TIPS

- **Follow their lead:** Let your kids pick the outdoor activities
- **Create teamwork goals:** Play cooperative games instead of competitive ones.
- **Talk about the day:** Have a quick chat after the trip. This turns a day out into a shared family story. Accept the tough stuff and the good stuff as part of the day. There will be bumps in the road! Let go of perfection.

