

Note From the CEO



I want to take a moment to reflect on what hope can look like this holiday season. For many families we serve, this time of year brings both joy and challenges. The pressures of creating perfect celebrations, managing packed schedules, and navigating complex family dynamics can feel overwhelming. Yet it is precisely during these moments that hope becomes most powerful—not as an escape from reality, but as an anchor that helps us focus on what truly matters: connection, rest, and the meaningful experiences we share with those we love.

This month, we're pleased to share practical guidance from our Senior Clinical Director, Dr. David Thomas, on reducing family stress during the holidays. His insights remind us that we don't need drastic changes to find peace—just mindful adjustments, shared responsibilities, and a willingness to let go of perfection. Whether it's setting realistic expectations, protecting healthy routines, or simply slowing down to play a game together, these small shifts can transform the season from overwhelming to joyful. I encourage you to consider which strategies might work for you.

I'm also excited to highlight the incredible work happening across our programs. Our Teen Connect classes continue to support parents navigating the challenges of raising teenagers, while our SFSN and CF teams made a strong showing at the TN All Peer Conference. As we move forward into the new year with upcoming trainings and courses, I'm reminded that hope is built through community. Thank you for being part of ours, and may this season bring you moments of peace, connection, and renewal.

With gratitude,
Rikki Harris
CEO, TN Voices

How to Reduce Stress in Families During the Holiday Season

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The holiday season is often described as “the most wonderful time of the year,” but for many families, it can also be the most stressful. Between financial pressures, packed

schedules, family dynamics, and the pressure to create perfect celebrations, it's easy for stress levels to rise. Fortunately, with intentional choices and realistic expectations, families can make the holidays more peaceful, meaningful, and enjoyable.

1. Set Realistic Expectations

One major source of holiday stress is the pressure to create picture-perfect celebrations. Instead of striving for an idealized version of the holidays, focus on what truly matters: connection, rest, and shared experiences.

- Allow traditions to evolve.
- Accept that not everything will go as planned.
- Communicate early about what each person hopes for, and aim for balance rather than perfection.

2. Plan Ahead and Prioritize

Overstuffed holiday schedules often lead to burnout. Before the season begins, sit down as a family and decide:

- Which events are essential
- Which activities are optional
- How much time you want to carve out for rest

Creating a shared calendar can make commitments feel more manageable. Protect downtime just as you would any other important appointment.

3. Manage Financial Stress

Gift-giving, travel, and holiday meals can strain budgets. Reducing financial stress may require open discussion and creative alternatives:

- Set spending limits for gifts.
- Try group gifts or Secret Santa exchanges.
- Make handmade or experiential gifts.
- Plan simple, potluck-style holiday meals.

Remember, meaningful moments cost far less than material items.

4. Share Responsibilities

Holiday preparations often fall unevenly on one or two family members, leading to resentment and exhaustion. Instead, divide responsibilities:

- Kids can help with decorating or gift-wrapping.
- Teenagers can assist with errands or cooking.
- Adults can split shopping, hosting duties, and cleanup.

A shared workload not only eases pressure but also creates opportunities for connection.

5. Protect Healthy Routines

With late nights, rich foods, and constant activities, it's easy to abandon healthy habits. Maintaining some consistency can significantly reduce stress:

- Prioritize sleep.
- Take breaks for fresh air or short walks.
- Stay hydrated and balance indulgent foods with nourishing choices.
- Encourage quiet time or screen-free moments.

Small habits help maintain physical and emotional energy throughout the season.

6. Set Boundaries With Extended Family

Holiday gatherings can sometimes stir up old tensions. To avoid unnecessary conflict:

- Limit the duration of gatherings if needed.
- Communicate clear boundaries around sensitive topics.
- Take breaks during events, such as short walks or time outside.

It's okay to leave early or decline invitations in order to protect your well-being.

7. Focus on Connection, Not Chore Lists

Stress can overshadow the very moments families hope to cherish. Instead of rushing through to-dos, slow down and create small rituals of connection:

- Play a game together.
- Watch a favorite movie.
- Bake cookies as a team.
- Share stories from past holidays.

Quality time fosters warmth and strengthens family relationships.

8. Practice Gratitude and Mindfulness

Gratitude reframes stress and brings attention back to what's meaningful. Try:

- A nightly gratitude round at the dinner table.
- Short mindfulness moments, such as breathing exercises.
- A gratitude jar throughout December.

These practices help everyone—adults and kids alike—feel more grounded.

9. Allow Flexibility When Emotions Run High

The holidays can magnify emotions—joy, nostalgia, loneliness, and pressure. If someone in the family feels overwhelmed:

- Offer space to rest.
- Validate their feelings without judgment.
- Simplify plans instead of forcing them.

Being emotionally flexible eases tension and fosters empathy.

10. Keep the Holidays Meaningful

Ask your family what values matter most this season—joy, generosity, rest, spirituality, tradition, creativity—and let those guide decisions.

When meaning drives the holiday, stress takes a back seat.

Final Thoughts

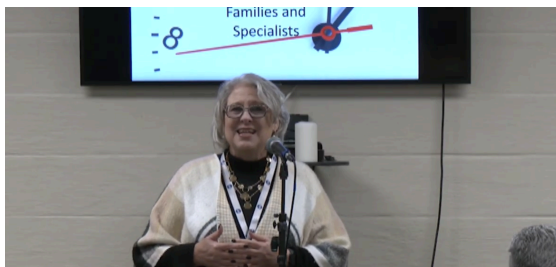
Reducing stress during the holiday season doesn't require drastic changes—just mindful adjustments, shared responsibilities, clear communication, and a focus on what truly matters. By simplifying expectations and prioritizing connection, families can transform the holidays from overwhelming to joyful.

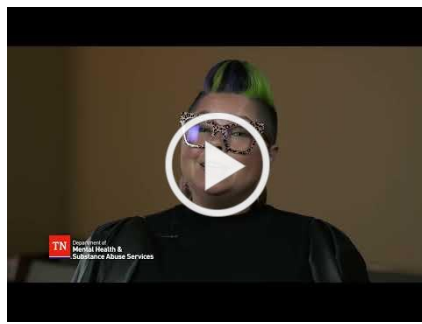
TN Voices Team

2025 TN All-Peer Conference

Planting Seeds, Harvesting Hope: Recovery Through Shared Stories

This conference pulled together Certified Peer Recovery Specialists (CPRS), Certified Young Adult Support Specialists (CYAPSS), and Certified Family Support Specialists (CFSS) for a time of support and networking. TN Voices' staff represented CFSSs well! Jennifer Davis presented a keynote on what it means to be a CFSS and how to become one, Aneta Eichler taught a breakout session on the importance of boundaries for the specialists and the families, and Sabrina Moore was a part of an ethics presentation and panel. The conference provided an opportunity to hear peers share their stories and to engage in meaningful connection. These shared experiences allowed us to encourage and uplift one another, strengthening not only the support we provide to families, but also our own growth and renewal as peers walking this journey together.





The TN Voices team at the Clay County Recovery Fest (top left), MNPS/PENCIL Career Fair (top right), Find Help Franklin Mental Health Summit (bottom left), and the Martha O'Bryan Center Trunk or Treat (bottom right).



Have you thought of a career in Mental Health?
Check out our open positions at [TN Voices](#).

Program Highlight
Teen Connect

FREE! Teen Connect Parenting Group

If you are a parent of a teen experiencing challenging behaviors, you are welcome to learn alongside us in Teen Connect! Our goal is to provide you a safe space and supportive skills to help build a stronger relationship with your teen.



This is a FREE 10-week virtual Parenting Class, offering day and evening classes.

For more information, contact:

Karen Howell



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Monique Jenkins



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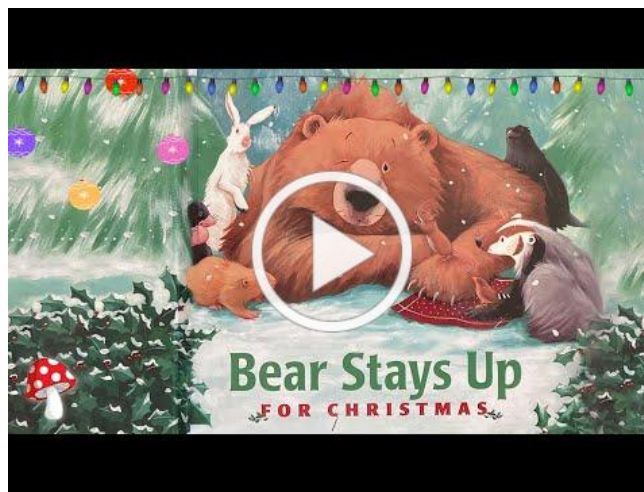
Teen Connect is for parents/caregivers of teenagers ages 12-18 who have challenging behaviors that put them at risk of out-of-home placement or whose children are already placed outside of the home. Teen Connect teaches parents how to respond to a teenager who is struggling behaviorally or emotionally, using empathy. It teaches how attachment relates to teen development, as well as helping the parent to better identify the need the teenager is expressing through their behavior.

Teen Connect is a ten-week long, free online program. Classes are offered during the day as well as in the evening. For more information or to make a referral, please contact Monique Jenkins, mjenkins@tnvoices.org or Karen Howell, karen.howell@tnvoices.org.

Make a Referral

Online Library Resources

Bear Stays up for Christmas



[View more resources in our online library here!](#)

This fact sheet explains how Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs)—such as safe relationships, community belonging, and opportunities to learn—can build children's resilience and buffer the harmful effects of trauma and adversity.

Fostering Resilience Fact Sheet

Upcoming Trainings

Mental Health First Aid Classes: IN-PERSON Training

Mental Health First Aid teaches you how to identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental health and substance use challenges among youth (in YMHFA) and adults (in AMHFA).

January 17th, 9 am-3 pm CT – Meeting at the First Presbyterian Church of Spring Hill (Spring Hill). Register [here](#). For more information, contact Michelle Reeves at Michelle.Reeves@tnvoices.org.

March 11th, 9am-5pm EST – Meeting at King Family Library (Sevierville). Register [here](#). For more information, contact Mindy Sidwell at Melinda.Sidwell@tnvoices.org.

March 28th, 9 am-3 pm CT – Meeting at StoneCom (Cookeville). Register [here](#). For more information, contact Michelle Reeves at Michelle.Reeves@tnvoices.org.

To inquire about scheduling Adult or Youth Mental Health First Aid training in East TN, contact Mindy Sidwell at Melinda.Sidwell@tnvoices.org.

To inquire about scheduling Adult or Youth Mental Health First Aid training in Middle TN, contact Michelle Reeves at Michelle.Reeves@tnvoices.org.

Nurturing Parenting: Virtual training via Teams

This is an evidence-based class that builds protective factors in families that, when present, increase the health and well-being of children and families. It is an innovative approach to empower parents in creating a competency-based parenting plan to meet the specific needs of their family. Each class meets twice a week (2.5 hours per session) for 4 weeks.

Starting January 5th (Mondays and Tuesdays), 5-7:30 pm CT. Register [here](#). For more information, contact Carolyn Lawson at Carolyn.Lawson@tnvoices.org.

Starting February 9th (Mondays and Wednesdays), 11 am-1:30 pm ET. Register [here](#). For more information, contact Brittany Goins at Brittany.Goins@tnvoices.org.

ReACT: Accountability, Control, and Transformation (Anger Management Training) – Virtual training via Teams

ReACT is a free 8-week training that utilizes accountability and education to improve anger management. Participants will learn: 1) Brain science related to anger management; 2) What it takes to process our anger emotion differently, and 3) Doable strategies to change our response to anger triggers. There are separate classes for parents and youth.

ReACT for Parents - Starting January 6th, (Tuesdays) 5-6:30pm CT. Register [here](#).

ReACT for Youth (ages 12-17) – Starting January 7th (Wednesdays), 5-6:00pm CT. Register [here](#).

For more information, contact Cynthia Stockton at Cynthia.Stockton@tnvoices.org.

Parent 2 Parent Advocacy Training: January 6th & 7th, 8am-4pm CT via Teams

P2P is a free 2-day (Tuesday and Wednesday) class to equip you with tools to advocate for your child and family. It is also a step towards certification as a Family Support Specialist so that you can also advocate with and for other families. Topics include: System of Care (coordinating supports for children & families), Effective Advocacy (making your voice heard), Finding Resources, IEP & 504 Plans (your child's rights and the process), among other topics. Register [here](#).

For more information, contact Jordan Buchanan at Jordan.Buchanan@tnvoices.org.

Family Support Specialist Competency Course: January 26-30 and February 2-6 via Zoom

This 40-hour course prepares individuals to support others using their lived experience and training, and to become certified through the TN Department of Mental Health and

Substance Abuse Services. This course is repeated monthly. There is a \$750 fee for the course, with scholarships available for qualified applicants. For questions or to request an application, contact fsscompetencycourse@tnvoices.org.



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