

## Supporting Your Family Through the Winter Doldrums

Written by Lisa von Wahlde, MSW, LCSW, Director of Therapy

It never fails. In the fall, we settle into the rhythm of school, enjoy cozy fire pits (once the St. Louis heat finally breaks), and pick pumpkins, only to run full steam into Daylight Savings Time. As the clocks roll back, you can almost hear the collective groan of caregivers as sunlight fades faster and faster beyond the horizon each day. Waking up in the dark and returning home in the dark from November through March takes a toll. It's no wonder so many of us feel "down" or just not like ourselves during this time of year.

### Is it the "winter blahs" or something more?

Less sunshine, colder temperatures, and reduced time outdoors can impact everyone—children and caregivers alike—leading to an overall "bleh" feeling. Whether or not the holidays bring cheer, many people experience increased irritability, sadness, fatigue, and lethargy in their wake. This dip in mood can ripple through families, causing more arguments, isolation, and struggles with school or work.

Fortunately, the winter blues tend to come and go, often offset by cozy moments like sipping cocoa, reading a book, or watching a favorite movie. But when the season significantly impacts someone's mood, thoughts, and behaviors, it may be something more serious, such as Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). SAD is a form of depression that follows a seasonal pattern. If you or your child notice significant mood changes during specific times of the year (SAD can even occur in summer), it's important to connect with a mental health professional for guidance.

### What Can Families Do to Combat the Winter Blues?

Be aware of how winter affects you and your family, and create an action plan to navigate the season:

- **Incorporate Physical Activity:** If your family feels more lethargic, find creative ways to stay active. Try walking around a museum, visiting a local YMCA or community center, or doing family-friendly stretching and exercises at home. (Check out the OT Corner for more ideas!)

- **Balance Food Choices:** If irritability is on the rise, pay attention to what everyone is eating. Winter tends to feature comfort foods and sweet treats. While those are great in moderation, balancing them with foods that fuel energy and focus can help improve mood.

- **Prioritize Quality Sleep:** Darkness doesn't always equal restful sleep. Maintaining consistent wake-up and bedtimes helps train the brain for better sleep.

- **Check In Regularly:** Plan intentional times to talk as a family. Asking your child or teen how things are going at school, work, or with friends can help identify underlying stressors.

- **Reconnect as a Family:** If everyone seems to be isolating more, decide together how to reconnect. Whether it's a family game night, reading out loud, watching a movie, or sharing a meal, any activity that provides connection will help.



• **Engage with Your Community:** You're not alone. According to the American Psychiatric Association, 41% of people in the U.S. experience winter blues. Talking with friends or loved ones can make a big difference.

• **Seek Professional Support:** If you or your loved ones are experiencing a significant dip in mood that isn't alleviated by enjoyable activities, don't hesitate to reach out to a mental health professional.



For more resources to help you and your family navigate the winter months, scan the QR code.

## OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY CORNER

*Written by Gillian Jones, OTR/L*

### Beating the Winter Blues

Does your child have “cabin fever” during the winter months? You're not alone! Wintertime presents unique challenges for caregivers and children alike—cold temperatures and snowy weather limit the types of outdoor play opportunities that allow children to burn off their extra energy.

Movement opportunities, no matter the time of year, are necessary throughout a child's day. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention identifies that children ages 6 and up need at least 60 minutes of movement a day for the benefit of their mental and physical well-being.

As occupational therapists, we know how important movement and play are for helping kids stay focused and feel more in control of their emotions and energy. Simple, predictable movements can help kids calm down and feel organized, while faster, high-energy activities can wake up their minds and grab their attention.

To help families beat the “winter blues,” we've compiled a list of indoor-friendly movement activities that you and your child can enjoy together!

- **Dance together for short bursts of aerobic activity:** Try a freeze dance or similar quick activity.
- **Build an indoor obstacle course:** Use cushions, blankets, and other household objects. For an added challenge, see if they can move from object to object without touching the ground.
- **Create an indoor scavenger hunt:** Give your children a list of colors, letters, or other criteria. See if they can find objects that match the list—for example, something that matches each color or starts with each letter of the alphabet.
- **Play hide-and-seek or hot-and-cold:** Take turns hiding and finding each other. If it's safest for your child to remain in your line of sight, try a variation where ‘hot’ or ‘cold’ hints help each other find a hidden item.
- **Make activity dice or a spinner:** Modify a cardboard box or an old board game spinner by writing different movement activities on each side. Animal walks (crab, bear, penguin, bunny) are always a hit! For teens, include workout movements and play a family workout game.
- **Jump and crash into a soft pile:** Create a pile of pillows, blankets, beanbags, or stuffed animals and let your child jump away!
- **Play with balloons:** Use balloons for versatile indoor movement breaks. Play “don't let the balloon touch the ground,” balloon volleyball, or balloon basketball.
- **Toss a soft object for an indoor game of catch:** If throwing a ball inside is a safety concern, use a rolled-up pair of soft socks instead. Keep tosses slow and rhythmic for sensory organizing.

- **Get kids involved in household chores:** Encourage physical activities like pushing a full laundry basket, carrying shopping bags, vacuuming, or sorting laundry.
- **Act out stories while reading:** Create movements for the story's actions or act out the plot together. This provides movement input while also supporting reading comprehension.
- **Explore free or low-cost local resources:** Visit public libraries, the Science Center, Missouri History Museum, and Magic House/MADE for Kids (free the third Friday of every month from 5-8 p.m.) for hands-on events and exhibits that encourage active family engagement.
- **Sign up for team sports if kids are interested:** For older kids, consider the Boys and Girls Club—annual memberships are reasonably priced at \$25 per year.

Winter doesn't have to mean restless days stuck inside. With a little creativity, you can help your child stay active, engaged, and happy all season long!





safer, healthier relationships  
for children and families

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## Our Vision

FamilyForward leads the community in providing innovative solutions for advancing safer, healthier relationships for children and families.

## Our Mission

FamilyForward moves vulnerable children in the direction of hope by delivering comprehensive therapeutic and educational services to support biological, foster, and adoptive families.

Visit [familyforwardmo.org/publications](http://familyforwardmo.org/publications) to read LifeLines online.

## Educational Opportunities for Adoptive, Foster, and Kinship Parents

All in-person classes will be held at FamilyForward's Developmental Trauma Center located at 11358 Van Cleve Ave in St. Louis County. *Light refreshments will be provided.*

### Core Teen Training

Tuesdays: January 14, 21, February 11, 18, March 11, 18, and April 8, 2025 | 6:00-9:00 pm  
(April 8 class will be held from 6:00-8:00 pm)

Spaulding for Children presents a specialized training for resource parents to support teens with moderate to severe emotional and behavioral needs. The course is designed to reduce the risk of placement disruptions and increase permanency options by providing trauma-informed, culturally responsive training. The interactive content includes lectures, videos, activities, and discussions, offering multiple opportunities for learning and skill-building. Participants are encouraged to attend all sessions. 14 hours of training credit is available.

### MO C.A.R.E. Preservice Training

Thursdays: January 16, 23, 30, February 6, 13, 20, 27, and March 6, 13, 20, 2025 | 6:00-9:00 pm

This state-required training is for individuals seeking foster care licensure in Missouri. 30 hours of training credit is available. To enroll, contact [Teresa.A.McKenzie@dss.mo.gov](mailto:Teresa.A.McKenzie@dss.mo.gov).

### RPC Trauma Training: Caring for Children Who Have Experienced Trauma

Thursdays: February 3, 10, 17, 24, and March 3, 2025 | 6:00-9:00 pm

This 15-hour curriculum, developed by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) with support from SAMHSA, helps adoptive, foster, and kinship parents understand and respond to the effects of trauma in children. The course aims to create trauma-informed caregivers who can guide their children through recovery and healing. The training includes case vignettes, personal experiences, and worksheets, helping parents address the behavioral and emotional challenges trauma presents.

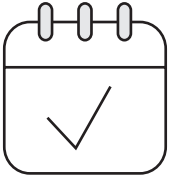
### Show Me Healthy Kids (SMHK) Presentation

**Presenter:** Mary Mogg, MSW

Session 1: Wednesday, February 5 | 10:00 am-12:00 pm

Session 2: Thursday, March 20 | 6:00 pm-8:00 pm

Learn about the benefits offered through SMHK, such as reimbursement for well-care doctor visits, transportation services for birth parents, and free sensory kits for some children. This session will help caregivers navigate the healthcare system and access the treatments and benefits they need for the children in their care.



## REGISTER FOR TRAINING

Call: 314.534.9350 ext. 7234  
Email: [intake.dept@familyforwardmo.org](mailto:intake.dept@familyforwardmo.org)



## ONLINE RESOURCES

Sign up for our LifeLines email newsletter and view training information online by scanning the QR code or by visiting [familyforwardmo.org/calendar](http://familyforwardmo.org/calendar)

# Listen now!

SEASON TWO OF THE PODCAST IS LIVE!

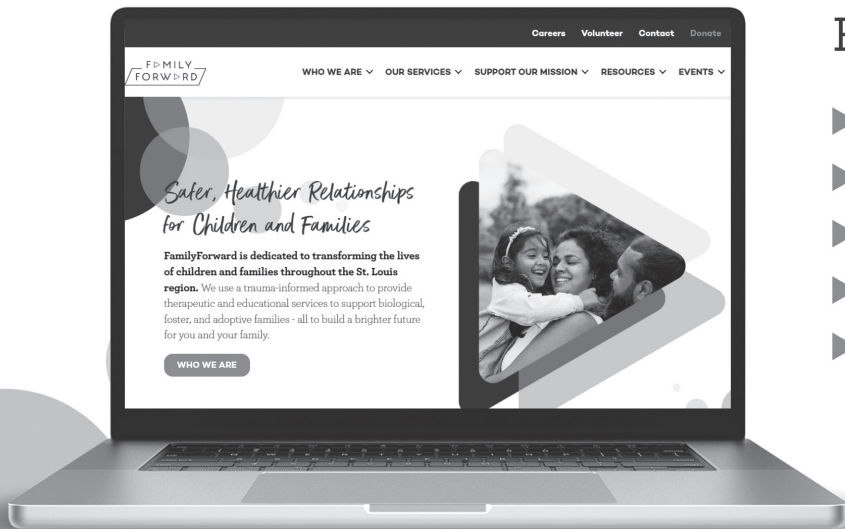
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