

CSD Cultivating Inclusion Committee News

Person and Family-Centered Care in December

A common greeting throughout the month of December is “Merry Christmas.” Providing Person and Family-Centered Care requires us to understand that not all of our clients (or our students, faculty, and staff) celebrate Christmas. Although many are not offended by the salutation, we should respectfully consider whether the phrase reflects our clients’ belief systems. For example, while the Church of the Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) celebrate Christmas, Jehovah’s Witnesses do not. We serve many people of different faiths or of no particular faith.

How do we handle this with our clients and each other? You may know the client and family well enough to ascertain their faith and culture and this information informs your behavior. Otherwise, make no assumptions. If a person volunteers “Merry Christmas,” you may want to respond with the same or, if this is not your faith, “Yes, I hope you have a Merry Christmas.” Here are some holidays and festivals celebrated in or near December in non-Christian faiths and cultures:

Hanukkah-an eight-day festival commemorating the rededication of the Temple in 165 BC by the Maccabees after its desecration by the Syrians. The dates vary year to year, and although it’s timing occurs near the hustle and bustle of Christmas, it is not a major Jewish holiday.

Kwanzaa is an 8-day festival celebrating African American culture. It is not related to faith or to Christmas.

Buddhists celebrate **Bohdi Day** in December. This commemorates the day that Gautama Buddha is said to have attained enlightenment.

Diwali is a Hindu holiday for which the date of celebration varies. In 2026, it will be celebrated on November 8th. It symbolizes the spiritual victory of Dharma over Adharma, light over darkness, good over evil, and knowledge over ignorance.

Whatever time of year we are in, having awareness of the major holidays and festivals of other cultures and religions is one feature of providing respectful and culturally competent care.