

Mending Joseph

Character Breakdown for Auditions

Casting Overview

Mending Joseph is an ensemble family drama with strong comedic elements and a Christian message centered on abandonment, forgiveness, reconciliation, and grace. The story follows one family through five Christmas gatherings between 1982 and 1998.

Ages listed below are **character ages**, not mandatory actor ages. Adult actors must be able to portray gradual aging through changes in costume, hair, makeup, posture, and emotional maturity.

Principal Roles

HOLLY

Gender: Female

Age: Approximately 20 in Act One; approximately 36 by Act Five

Race/Ethnicity: Not specified

Family Relationships: Daughter of Mom and Father; sister of Nathan and Josh; wife of Eric; mother of Clay

Appears In: Acts One–Five

Approximate Line Count: 187 dialogue cues

Role Size: Largest role / principal lead

Holly is outspoken, energetic, funny, observant, and emotionally direct. At twenty, she is a newlywed who is proud of her modest life with Eric and eager to maintain her family's Christmas traditions. She has a quick wit and frequently uses sarcasm, teasing, and humor to manage uncomfortable situations.

As the years pass, Holly becomes a mother and gradually realizes that her marriage resembles the broken marriage she witnessed as a young woman. Eric's emotional absence and eventual abandonment leave her angry, exhausted, and deeply wounded. Her pain is intensified by the earlier abandonment of her father.

Holly is often the family member most determined to discuss problems, make decisions, and keep traditions alive. In the final act, she must confront her estranged father and decide whether forgiveness is possible. Her journey gives the play much of its emotional weight.

Audition Considerations:

Requires excellent comedic timing, emotional vulnerability, strong listening skills, and the ability to portray a convincing sixteen-year progression. The actor must move naturally between rapid family banter, bitterness, grief, anger, tenderness, and forgiveness.

JOSH

Gender: Male

Age: Approximately 21–22 in Act One; approximately 37–38 by Act Five

Race/Ethnicity: Not specified; should plausibly belong to the same family as Holly and Nathan

Family Relationships: Son of Mom and Father; brother of Holly and Nathan

Appears In: Acts One–Five

Approximate Line Count: 176 dialogue cues

Role Size: Principal lead

Josh begins the play as a charismatic, sarcastic college senior who is more interested in parties, women, and appearances than responsibility. He is intelligent, funny, socially confident, and skilled at turning nearly every situation into a joke. He frequently mocks Nathan, especially Nathan's employment, personality, and Christian faith.

Over the years, Josh achieves material success but remains emotionally immature. He cycles through girlfriends, exaggerates relationships, shows off his possessions, and uses humor and status to conceal his loneliness. His confidence is often performative, and his cruelty toward Nathan reflects his own insecurity.

Josh has one of the play's most layered arcs. In the final act, his mother's letter forces him to confront the possibility that his apparently successful life has been emotionally empty. His reaction is defensive and explosive, but it reveals the hurt beneath his bravado.

Audition Considerations:

Requires sharp comedic instincts, charisma, emotional complexity, and the ability to make an abrasive character understandable rather than one-dimensional. The actor must portray Josh's humor, arrogance, insecurity, anger, and buried desire for love and belonging.

NATHAN

Gender: Male

Age: Early to mid-20s in Act One; late 30s to early 40s by Act Five

Race/Ethnicity: Not specified; should plausibly belong to the same family as Holly and Josh

Family Relationships: Son of Mom and Father; brother of Holly and Josh; boyfriend and later husband of Ellen; father of Hannah

Appears In: Acts One–Five

Approximate Line Count: 135 dialogue cues

Role Size: Principal lead

Nathan is quiet, awkward, patient, and frequently underestimated by his family. At the beginning of the play, he lives at home, has difficulty establishing a career, and is regularly mocked by Josh. He does not naturally command attention and often allows stronger personalities to dominate family conversations.

Through his relationship with Ellen, Nathan becomes a Christian. His conversion becomes a major source of tension because his family initially views it with suspicion or ridicule. Nathan's faith is sincere, although he is still imperfect, uncertain, and capable of losing his temper.

As the play progresses, Nathan becomes the family's most consistent example of forgiveness. He reconnects with his estranged father and eventually forgives him, not to appear morally superior, but because he genuinely wants healing. He is a quiet emotional center of the story and grows into a compassionate husband, father, brother, and son.

Audition Considerations:

Requires subtle acting, warmth, grounded humor, and the ability to communicate thought and emotion without always speaking. The actor must show Nathan's movement from insecurity to conviction without making him seem self-righteous or overly polished.

MOM

Gender: Female

Age: Approximately early to mid-40s in Act One; late 50s to early 60s in Act Four

Race/Ethnicity: Not specified

Family Relationships: Mother of Holly, Nathan, and Josh; daughter of Grandma; estranged wife of Father; grandmother of Clay and Hannah

Appears In: Acts One–Four

Approximate Line Count: 134 dialogue cues

Role Size: Principal supporting role

Mom is the emotional and practical center of the family's Christmas gatherings. She cooks, worries, offers money, maintains traditions, and tries to hold everyone together. She is loving and generous but sometimes avoids painful truths in an attempt to protect her children.

In Act One, she is struggling to conceal the fact that her husband has left after twenty-three years of marriage. Although devastated, she tries to create a normal Christmas for her children. Over the years, she remains deeply connected to all three children and continues caring for her elderly mother.

Mom initially treats Nathan's Christianity as a personal choice she does not fully understand. Before her death, however, she comes to recognize the grace and transformation she has witnessed in him. Her final letter becomes the spiritual and emotional climax of the play, urging each of her children to forgive.

Audition Considerations:

Requires warmth, maternal authority, comedic timing, and considerable emotional depth. The actor must portray aging, heartbreak, resilience, tenderness, and a believable evolution in faith. Although Mom does not appear alive in Act Five, her presence remains central through the letter Holly reads.

Major Supporting Roles

ELLEN

Gender: Female

Age: Early to mid-20s in Act One; late 30s to early 40s by Act Five

Race/Ethnicity: Not specified

Family Relationships: Nathan's girlfriend and later wife; sister-in-law of Holly and Josh; mother of Hannah

Appears In: Acts One–Five

Approximate Line Count: 47 dialogue cues

Role Size: Major supporting role

Ellen is kind, emotionally intelligent, patient, and quietly strong. She is already a committed Christian when introduced and has been taking Nathan to church. Although she encourages his spiritual interest, she firmly rejects Josh's accusation that she manipulated Nathan into converting so that he could marry her.

Ellen is not loud or attention-seeking, but she is willing to challenge unkindness and defend Nathan when necessary. She becomes a stable member of the family and provides warmth, humor, and perspective. Her relationship with Nathan should feel genuine and supportive without being unrealistically perfect.

By Act Four, Ellen is comfortable enough within the family to joke, play video games with Clay, and speak honestly to Josh. Her faith is expressed primarily through her character and relationships rather than through speeches.

Audition Considerations:

Requires warmth, sincerity, quiet confidence, and natural chemistry with Nathan. The actor should be able to portray conviction without harshness and goodness without making Ellen bland or overly idealized.

FATHER

Gender: Male

Age: Approximately early to mid-60s in Act Five

Race/Ethnicity: Not specified; should plausibly be the biological father of Holly, Nathan, and Josh

Family Relationships: Estranged husband of Mom; father of Holly, Nathan, and Josh; grandfather of Clay and Hannah

Appears In: Act Five only

Approximate Line Count: 18 dialogue cues

Role Size: Featured dramatic role

Father abandoned his wife and children sixteen years before the final act. For most of the play, he exists through the pain, anger, and questions left behind by his absence. When he finally appears, he is nervous, remorseful, and aware that he has no right to demand forgiveness.

He attended Mom's funeral from a distance and comes to the family home only to deliver the letter she entrusted to him. He does not excuse his actions or pressure his children to reconcile. His attempt to repair the broken Joseph figurine symbolically mirrors his desire to help mend what he damaged.

Father's reunion with Holly is restrained and tentative. The possibility of breakfast the following morning represents only a beginning, not an instant restoration of the family.

Audition Considerations:

A brief but emotionally significant role requiring maturity, humility, restraint, and strong listening. The actor must communicate years of regret without relying on excessive crying or melodrama.

ERIC

Gender: Male

Age: Early to mid-20s

Race/Ethnicity: Not specified

Family Relationships: Holly's husband; father of Clay

Appears In: Acts One and Two

Approximate Line Count: 17 dialogue cues

Role Size: Supporting character

Eric is Holly's young husband. He works at a quick-lube business, loves cars and mechanical projects, and tends to describe mundane events as though they are fascinating accomplishments. His repetitive enthusiasm provides some of the play's broadest comedy.

In Act One, Holly views him with affection and pride. By Act Two, the strain in their marriage is becoming visible. Eric is not initially presented as openly cruel, but he is immature, inattentive, and unable or unwilling to understand Holly's needs. His later abandonment occurs offstage but becomes an important part of Holly's story.

Audition Considerations:

Requires strong deadpan comedy and the ability to be funny without playing Eric as a cartoon. The actor should also allow hints of the incompatibility and emotional disconnection developing beneath the humor.

CLAY

Gender: Male

Age: Infant in Act Two, age 3 in Act Three, age 9 in Act Four, and age 13 in Act Five

Race/Ethnicity: Not specified; should plausibly be the child of Holly and Eric

Family Relationships: Son of Holly and Eric; nephew of Nathan and Josh; grandson of Mom and Father

Speaking Appearances: Acts Four and Five

Approximate Line Count: 17 dialogue cues

Role Size: Supporting youth role

Clay is Holly's son. He is present as a baby or small child in earlier acts but becomes a speaking character at age nine. He is energetic, humorous, and comfortable with the extended family. His video-game scene with Ellen provides comedy and establishes the warmth of their relationship.

At thirteen, Clay is old enough to recognize the family's grief and tension but is still somewhat removed from the deeper history involving his grandfather. He represents the next generation and gives added significance to Father's request to meet his grandson.

Audition Considerations:

Best suited to a confident young performer who can play approximately ages nine through thirteen. Requires clear delivery, comic timing, and the ability to remain emotionally present during serious ensemble scenes.

JOANN

Gender: Female

Age: Approximately late 20s to late 30s

Race/Ethnicity: Not specified

Family Relationships: Josh's friend or casual romantic interest

Appears In: Act Four

Approximate Line Count: 16 dialogue cues

Role Size: Featured supporting role

Joann is intelligent, direct, and increasingly uncomfortable with the way Josh presents their relationship to his family. Josh claims they have been dating for nine months and treats her as though she is his committed girlfriend. Joann reveals that she has known him for only four months and does not consider them a serious couple.

She quickly recognizes that Josh is using her to create the appearance of romantic success. Rather than quietly accepting the performance, she confronts him in front of his family and leaves.

Audition Considerations:

Requires confident comedic and dramatic delivery. Joann should not seem cruel; her anger is justified, and her confrontation exposes Josh's dishonesty and insecurity.

Featured Supporting and Comic Roles

TIFFANY

Gender: Female

Age: Approximately 19–23

Race/Ethnicity: Not specified

Family Relationships: Josh's girlfriend in Act One

Appears In: Act One

Approximate Line Count: 6 dialogue cues

Role Size: Featured comic role

Tiffany is a college student studying veterinary medicine. She is deeply concerned about animals but is naïve, literal, and somewhat confused about the world around her. She wonders whether the family's carpet is organic and explains the difference between a veterinarian and a military veteran.

Her earnestness and lack of self-awareness create the humor. She should not be portrayed as intentionally ridiculous; Tiffany genuinely believes she is contributing useful information.

Audition Considerations:

A strong character-comedy role. Requires commitment, sincerity, and excellent timing. This role may potentially be doubled with Heather, Tiffany #2, or Joann.

HEATHER

Gender: Female

Age: Approximately early to mid-20s

Race/Ethnicity: Not specified

Family Relationships: Josh's girlfriend in Act Two

Appears In: Act Two

Approximate Line Count: 8 dialogue cues

Role Size: Featured comic role

Heather arrives with Josh in 1985. She is friendly but not especially perceptive. Because Grandma is losing her hearing, Heather mistakenly speaks loudly to Mom. She works at a nail salon and enthusiastically provides information about Josh's speeding, Porsche, and boat.

Heather is part of the continuing joke that Josh brings a different girlfriend to each family Christmas.

Audition Considerations:

Requires lively comic timing and a willingness to play social awkwardness with complete sincerity. This role may potentially be doubled with another of Josh's girlfriends.

TIFFANY #2

Gender: Female

Age: Approximately early to mid-20s

Race/Ethnicity: Not specified

Family Relationships: Josh's girlfriend in Act Three; not the same Tiffany seen in Act One

Appears In: Act Three

Approximate Line Count: 12 dialogue cues

Role Size: Featured comic role

Tiffany #2 is a business student who wants to open a ski shop in her hometown of Salina, Kansas. She is optimistic and enthusiastic but has apparently never considered the lack of mountains near her proposed business.

She is accustomed to being confused with Josh's previous girlfriends and explains that there have also been multiple Rebeccas and Michelles. When Nathan gently questions her business plan, she becomes upset but later tries to invent a way to make skiing work in Salina.

Audition Considerations:

Requires strong comic instincts, innocence, and total commitment to Tiffany's dream. She should be endearing rather than mocked. This role may potentially be doubled with Tiffany, Heather, or Joann.

GRANDMA

Gender: Female

Age: Approximately late 70s or older in Act One; very elderly by Act Five

Race/Ethnicity: Not specified; should plausibly be Mom's mother

Family Relationships: Mother of Mom; grandmother of Holly, Nathan, and Josh; great-grandmother of Clay and Hannah

Appears In: All five acts

Approximate Line Count: 2 dialogue cues

Role Size: Silent featured character with two major punch lines

Grandma remains seated in the same stage-right chair throughout the play. As the years pass, her hearing, sight, alertness, and physical abilities decline. The family repeatedly assumes that each Christmas may be her last, but she continues to outlive expectations.

Although she speaks only at the beginning and end of the play, Grandma is continuously visible and provides an important visual representation of time passing. Her final request for the Dr. Pepper she asked for sixteen years earlier provides the play's closing joke.

Audition Considerations:

This is not an insignificant role despite the minimal dialogue. The actor must remain engaged onstage for long periods, age convincingly, react subtly when appropriate, and sustain character without distracting from the main action.

Non-Speaking and Ensemble Roles

HANNAH

Gender: Female

Age: Infant

Race/Ethnicity: Not specified; should plausibly be the child of Nathan and Ellen

Family Relationships: Daughter of Nathan and Ellen; niece of Holly and Josh

Appears In: Act Four

Line Count: 0

Role Size: Non-speaking infant role

Hannah is Nathan and Ellen's new baby. She may be represented by a realistic prop doll rather than a live infant.

YOUNG CLAY

Gender: Male

Age: Infant in Act Two and age 3 in Act Three

Race/Ethnicity: Not specified

Family Relationships: Son of Holly and Eric

Appears In: Acts Two and Three

Line Count: 0 scripted individual lines

The younger versions of Clay may be represented by a car seat and infant doll in Act Two. A young child actor may be used in Act Three, although the role has no scripted individual dialogue and could potentially be staged without a separate performer, depending on the director's concept.

CHILDREN'S CHOIR

Gender: Any

Age: Children or youth

Race/Ethnicity: Any

Appears Between: Acts One through Four

Line Count: No individual scripted dialogue

The children's choir performs musical transitions between the family's Christmas gatherings. The choir helps maintain the Christmas atmosphere while allowing time for costume, makeup, prop, and set changes representing the passage of several years.

The exact number of choir members may be adjusted to suit the production. Individual musical solos or featured moments may be assigned at the director's discretion.

CAROLERS

Gender: Any

Age: Children, teens, or adults

Race/Ethnicity: Any

Appears In: Final scene of Act Five

Line Count: No individual dialogue

The carolers sing “Silent Night” outside the home during the final moments of the play. Holly and Nathan eventually go outside to join them.

The carolers may be played by the children’s choir, other ensemble members, or actors doubling from earlier roles.

EVERYONE / FAMILY ENSEMBLE RESPONSE

Gender: Mixed

Approximate Line Count: 1 collective scripted response

In Act Three, the family responds together during the Christmas photograph. This group response is counted separately and is not included in the individual characters’ totals.

Role Size Summary

Character	Gender	Approximate Age Span	Dialogue Cues
Holly	Female	20–36	187
Josh	Male	21/22–37/38	176
Nathan	Male	Early/mid-20s–late 30s/early 40s	135
Mom	Female	Early/mid-40s–late 50s/early 60s	134
Ellen	Female	Early/mid-20s–late 30s/early 40s	47
Father	Male	Early/mid-60s	18
Eric	Male	Early/mid-20s	17
Clay	Male	9–13 speaking	17
Joann	Female	Late 20s–late 30s	16
Tiffany #2	Female	Early/mid-20s	12
Heather	Female	Early/mid-20s	8
Tiffany	Female	19–23	6
Grandma	Female	Late 70s–90s	2
Everyone	Mixed	Various	1 group response

Character	Gender	Approximate Age Span	Dialogue Cues
Hannah	Female	Infant	0
Young Clay	Male	Infant/age 3	0 individual lines
Children's Choir	Any	Children/youth	Music only
Carolers	Any	Any age	Music only

Possible Doubling

Subject to licensing requirements and the director's staging needs, the following roles could potentially be doubled:

- **Tiffany / Heather / Tiffany #2 / Joann:** These women appear in separate acts as Josh's different romantic interests. Using one highly versatile comic actor for several or all of these roles could reinforce the running joke, although Joann requires more dramatic weight than the earlier girlfriends.
- **Eric / Father:** These roles do not appear in the same act, but doubling them may create unintended thematic implications because both men abandon Holly. This could be powerful if intentional, but distracting if not.
- **Children's Choir / Carolers:** The same ensemble can perform both functions.
- **Young Clay / Children's Choir Member:** A child appearing as three-year-old Clay could also participate in the choir during other transitions.

The core roles of Holly, Josh, Nathan, Mom, Ellen, Grandma, and speaking-age Clay should generally remain separate because of their sustained presence and family relationships.