

## **The Importance of Rituals to Family Life**

As Easter rapidly approaches and the supermarket shelves are laden with chocolate eggs, bunnies and buns, we hear our students talking about camping trips, rowing regattas, Easter egg hunts and we are reminded of the traditions and rituals that form so much of our lives. These family and community activities can hold very special meaning for families. They help us to communicate "this is who we are". Rituals generate a sense of belonging by letting everyone know what is important to the family.....not just any family, your family.

It is probably an opportune time to take stock of the rituals that form part of your family tradition. Some of these may have been handed down through the generations, like special recipes, the painting of the Easter Eggs, scones at Nan's after mass on Sunday or pancakes on Friday night. In this context, rituals can be instrumental in teaching children their family history and traditions you may create within your family. A friend, who has several daughters, planned a special one-on one shopping trip with each daughter on her thirteenth birthday. These trips became a much anticipated and treasured time with Mum.

There are no rules about what constitutes a ritual. It may be a religious or cultural ceremony like attending Midnight Mass, or it may be a crazy handshake, a particular family greeting, a game of eye spy in the car on family trips or a Sunday afternoon kick of the footy in the local park. Large or small, they are all important because they help build family ties.

Rituals can bring comfort and security to children who are distressed or in unfamiliar surroundings. How many of us have carted "blanky" or "bear" from pillar to post to provide comfort and familiarity for our small children? Traditions and rituals can also be the key element which provides security and certainty for children in times of distress, family breakdown or loss, uncertainty and change. Rituals can provide family ties and a sense of belonging which will last throughout life.

Rituals are often linked to large festivals like Christmas and Easter, but they can just as easily be developed for birthdays, mealtimes, weekends and bedtimes. They may be things that no-one but your family understands. A ritual can involve a common interest with other family members, like watching the footy on Friday night or attending the Boxing Day Test Match. A ritual can be as simple as a bedtime story, family meals together at the table or a night time prayer.

What are your family rituals? Do they involve creating time to spend together with your children? Ask your children what they perceive the family rituals to be. It might surprise you to hear just what it is they value most.

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