

Family Traditions and Rituals

As we approach Christmas and New Year we think about the traditions we've routinely maintained each year; some from previous generations, some from childhood and some fairly new. What are your traditions and have you considered how crucial they are for your children?

Traditions and rituals often tell a story about a family and help to provide a source of identity. On the macro level, traditions can teach children where their family came from or give them insights into their cultural or religious history. On a more micro level, traditions can serve as reminders of events that have shaped your family and your children e.g. every year your family camps at the same location, and each time you go it reminds you of all the experiences you've had on previous trips. There's something about understanding your past, predicting some aspects of the future through your traditions and knowing you belong to something bigger than yourself, that instils confidence and belonging.

Traditions and rituals can strengthen the family bond and offer comfort and security. Researchers have consistently found that families that engage in frequent traditions report stronger connection and unity than families that haven't established rituals. It's comforting to have these constants in your life.

Traditions can be particularly effective during times of change and even grief. For example, when moving house everything is new and strange for kids, but at least they know that every Friday is still pizza night and every Saturday morning they can still count on going on a bike ride with dad. If someone special passes away, by taking your children to a tree you planted in their honour each month, children can acknowledge their feelings of sadness and feel that the person has not been forgotten.

One of the main purposes of rituals, whether religious or secular, is to teach and reinforce values. The same goes with family traditions. Through nightly bedtime stories, the value of education, reading, and life-long learning is inculcated; through prayer, the importance of faith is re-enforced; through inviting extended family at Christmas time the importance of those relationships is affirmed and through regular family dinners or activities, family connectedness is reinforced.

In her book [*Ask the Children*](#), Ellen Galinsky, cofounder of the Families and Work Institute, describes a survey in which she asked children what they would remember most about their childhood. Most of the kids responded by talking about simple, everyday traditions like family dinners, holiday get-togethers, and bedtime stories. Traditions and rituals are where the lasting memories are created, not the latest gadgets, toys, what children perceive they must have at the time! Christmas time is one of the most ideal times in the year to set down family traditions.

Those positive childhood memories can help make your child a happier and more generous adult. One might consider nostalgia a sign of depression, however research at <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/09/science/what-is-nostalgia-good-for-quite-a-bit-research-shows.html?pagewanted=all> has shown that reflecting fondly on one's past actually provides a myriad of positive benefits including counteracting loneliness, boosting generosity towards strangers, and staving off anxiety.

To get the full benefits of nostalgia, though, you need to have a well-stocked “nostalgia bank.” What better way to fill that repository than by creating and maintaining meaningful family traditions. Small, regular rituals give us and our children unchanging way posts both to look forward to in anticipation, and look back on with satisfaction.

You might be asking yourself what are our family traditions and struggling to think of more than one or two. When considering a new tradition, first ask yourself, what’s the purpose of it? What do I hope my children and family get out of it? Do I want to instill a certain family value with the tradition? Perhaps family unity is what you’re aiming for. The answers to these questions will help ensure you develop meaningful family traditions.

Here are some websites with some ideas:

<http://www.parents.com/holiday/christmas/traditions/creating-family-traditions/>

<http://theimaginationtree.com/2013/12/50-family-christmas-traditions-magical-ideas.html>

<http://www.parenting.com/gallery/christmas-eve-traditions>

<http://www.familylife.com/articles/topics/holidays/featured/christmas/10-great-ideas-for-christmas-traditions>

<https://www.pinterest.com/explore/family-christmas-traditions/>

<http://www.kidspot.com.au/Christmas/Christmas-traditions-Create-family-traditions-Create-personal-family-Christ>

<http://www.clarkscondensed.com/holiday/family-christmas-traditions/>

Start slowly and pick a few. Family traditions are one of those areas where quality beats quantity every time. Kids find rituals fascinating—artistically, spiritually, and emotionally. Remember children find security and solace in something that gives a sense of belonging and comfort. There seems no more valuable reason than to create family traditions and rituals particularly at this time of the year!

We wish you all a safe, joyful and peaceful festive season and holiday break.

Gai Bath and Andrea Maver
School Councillors

gbath@smc.tas.edu.au

amaver@smc.tas.edu.au