

The Importance of Family Ritual

On my first family vacation with my husband and 5 month old daughter, we found ourselves reminiscing about our own childhood trips and vacations, and sharing memories of our family traditions. We talked about experiences we would like to share with our child that would incorporate each of our own family's rituals as well as things we would like to create for our new family.

Creating family rituals strengthens a family and can provide a sense of identity for a child. Family rituals give children a sense of belongingness and a feeling of being worthwhile. A ritual is any repeated, shared activity that is full of meaning and satisfying for its members. Values and beliefs are often reinforced through tradition. The importance of recurring family rituals, from the simple decision to have family mealtime to the more complex family vacation, cannot be overemphasized.

Similar to my experience, family rituals often develop or arise with the coming of children. Rituals are integral family resources that can act as a coping mechanism during times of challenge and change. These predictable patterns help family members feel more connected and know "this is the way our family does things." Rituals help us keep track of where we came from and who we are, which is very important for the developing child. Rituals become family keepsakes that you keep in your heart.

As a child, what family rituals or traditions did you have? Did your parent read to you every night before going to bed? Did your family gather at your grandparent's home for a family holiday meal? What did you do each summer? What family traditions have you carried on or begun on your own? Remember, rituals need not take a lot of time, money or energy and should not be limited to holidays or special occasions. They should work within the framework of your "real" life. A great family activity may be to take an inventory of your family's rituals and develop a new one all together.