

# The Importance of Family Traditions

By Cecilia Liversidge

Most of us have one or more “family traditions” that we celebrate, or take part in. A tradition can be something that is observed annually, monthly, or even daily. In the United States, we have some standard traditions like celebrating the Fourth of July with fireworks, inviting friends and family over for a hearty meal on Thanksgiving, and exchanging gifts for Christmas or Chanukah. Traditions can also be far more personal and distinctive like cooking together, going to the park on Sundays, or regularly playing card games together on a given night of the week. In my family, we set aside every Thursday as our official “family day.” We plan trips to the zoo with my son, strolls along the beach, or a lunch date at a local restaurant.

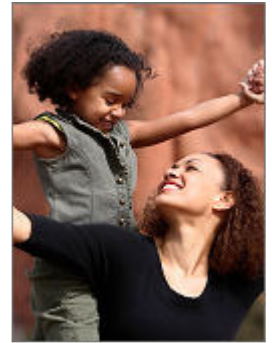


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## Traditions Bind Families

Traditions are an important part of family life. Traditions bind families together and facilitate intimacy. When families set aside time for functions, they are essentially creating opportunities for unique interactions. It is during these times that family members are able to talk about the current happenings of their lives, the feelings associated with them, as well as exchange ideas. This time together creates an opportunity for families to have dialogue that might otherwise not take place. Research suggests that families gain greater feelings of closeness, belonging and connection between generations as family traditions are acted out and passed on. In having set customs, rituals, or time together as a family, the family unit grows stronger.

## Traditions Benefit Children

Furthermore, the effects that traditions have on children are substantial. Children benefit tremendously from the feelings of unity and connectedness that are manifested through tradition. Research shows that the more often families eat together, the less likely kids are to smoke, drink, do drugs, get depressed, develop eating disorders and consider suicide, and the more likely they are to do well in school, delay having sex, eat their vegetables, learn extensive vocabulary, and decipher between which fork to use. Furthermore, kids who eat most often with their parents are 40% more likely to say they get mainly A's and B's in school than kids who have two or fewer family dinners a week.<sup>1</sup> Children thrive as a result of family tradition, even those that may seem simplistic or mundane. When families adopt traditions, children are able to sense a commitment to family that helps them to make healthy and balanced life choices.

## Traditions Serve as Markers

In addition to feelings of intimacy, traditions make it easier for family members to recall experiences shared. Traditions serve as markers. When families make a habit of spending a certain amount of time together, the memories seem to become automatically linked to those traditions or customs. I know this has proven true for me. When my husband and I were still dating, we reserved Mondays as our “fun days.” Thinking back, I vividly associate our Monday tradition with roller-blading at the beach, hiking in the mountains, or having dinner together. I fondly remember how I looked forward to our special dates, the interesting conversations we had while hiking, and the memorable moments spent strolling by the beach. With traditions as markers, we are able to commit to memory those special events or instances that might otherwise be forgotten.

## New Traditions

Finally, the structure of tradition provides flexibility. This may sound contradictory. But, if a family commits to spending a certain time together, the possibility for more traditions to develop as a result is very likely. For example, as I stated earlier my family observes every Thursday as family day. With each new week we plan something different to do. Some days may be spent at an amusement park, other days at the library and still others may be spent at home playing games. Yet, the arrangement of our lives around this day allows us to learn of new possible traditions to incorporate into our family life. We can not know that playing the card game UNO with our son will be his favorite activity after dinner until we try it, and we can not try it until we are intentional about the time spent together.

## Bringing Your Family Together

You may be wondering which traditions are right for you and your family. Consider a past time that will bring your family closer together. Begin by taking inventory of the activities your family enjoys doing together. It may be that your family is particularly active and therefore might benefit most from a tradition of “sports day.” On the other hand, your family may opt for a tradition of reading a book together. Remember that it is an opportunity to influence your children. Be flexible with the time you have set aside. You may realize that there are many different things your family enjoys doing together in which case the activity may change or evolve.

Finally, make the most of your tradition so that you can recall wonderful memories. Strong families find that opportunities for quality time occur as they spend quantity time together. I encourage you to set up a family tradition of your own. You will look back on the moments shared with your family with great joy.

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Cecilia Liversidge is a freelance writer living in southern California. All rights reserved © 2009 [AnswersForMe.org](http://AnswersForMe.org). Click here for [content usage information](#).

1. June 12th , 2006 issue of Time Magazine acquired thru Time.com