

Family Time and Relationships

by [Jim Burns](#)

My wife, Cathy, and I stared at each other in disbelief as our oldest daughter, Christy, told us she was running away. When she started packing her suitcase, we knew she was serious. Cathy and I weren't sure if we should laugh or cry — after all, Christy was only 6.

Our daughter told us she was moving to Julia's house across the street because her mommy and daddy were nicer. My wife called Julia's mother to tell her what was taking place and that Christy was on her way over. Then, we stood on our sidewalk and watched our little girl carry her suitcase and favorite doll across the street where Julia's mother waited outside the door to greet her.

A few hours later, Julia's mom reminded Christy it was Monday night and that our family always went to the Golden Spoon for frozen yogurt after dinner. It was a tradition my three girls looked forward to — including Christy. To our delight, she called and asked if she could go. It was a joyous reunion!

The weekly yogurt run was part of our family identity — part of what made us who we were. Even the neighbors knew our routine and sometimes shouted to-go orders as we pulled out of our driveway. Our three daughters are now grown, but when our family gets together, we still make trips to the Golden Spoon. It's one of those simple traditions that have kept our family bonds strong.

Not surprisingly, a strong family identity also helps children develop a strong and healthy self-identity. Knowing what makes their family unique — traditions, values, ways of relating to one another — gives children a clear starting point for discovering their own place in the world. Studies even show that kids who identify with their family's values tend to be less promiscuous and face less risk of drug and alcohol abuse.

Perhaps you're wondering, *How can we build a strong family identity?* Here are three principles to get you started.

Your presence matters. Children regard your presence as a sign of care and connectedness. Families who eat meals together, play together and build traditions together thrive. Does your family eat together at least four times a week? If so, there is a greater chance your kids will perform better in school and be less likely to exhibit negative behavior.

Although it may seem trite, a family that plays together, stays together. I'm not talking about just cheering on your kids at soccer games or dance recitals but actually playing together. One family I know has a pingpong tournament each week. The winner doesn't have to do the dishes for a

day. Our family had a Fun Day once a month. One of the girls picked an activity, and the rest of the family participated.

Celebrate everything. Don't miss a single chance to celebrate your family. You can celebrate rites of passage and other events such as Little League victories and graduations — from any grade

On birthdays, we go out to dinner then play a game called Affirmation Bombardment, in which each family member shares three words of encouragement for the birthday person.

Talk about faith. Spiritual topics don't always come naturally for families. Discussions about God, however, can help build family identity. They also help kids have strong convictions as they get older.

Maybe you have some anxiety about starting a faith conversation with your children. Remember, your talk doesn't have to be forced or lengthy; it can be simple, short and spontaneous. Let the discussion be as natural as possible. Getting preachy with your children can be just as unhelpful as avoiding the topic of faith.

One way to create opportunities to share your faith with your kids is to pray with them every day and do a weekly family devotional, even if only for five minutes. When your children are exposed to God's truth in small amounts, it can, as a friend of mine says, "help them develop a sweet tooth for Jesus."

Jesus said, "Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock" (Matthew 7:24-25).

This truth applies to families. At some point, storms will come to every family. But when you proactively build a strong family identity on the rock of Christ, your family can withstand whatever winds and rains come your way. A strong family identity will give your kids a solid foundation to cling to during those difficult times.

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