Creating Family Rituals & Traditions

BEDTIME RITUALS

This is a great time to gently reconnect with your kids and prepare them for dreaming. Having a soothing, cuddly goodnight ritual every night, preferable at close to the same time, vastly reduces bedtime battles.

Make-up time
The world is imperfect; families fight, but it really is a good idea not to go to bed angry. Try to make sure that conflicts between family members are resolved before everyone goes to sleep. Talk together about what went wrong and what might help.

Bath time
Any bath can be jazzed up by using bubble bath, candle light or a new bath toy. Soaps of different shapes, colors, and different fragrances can be presented now and then as small surprises. Children may also like to use their own washcloth and towel each night.

Tapes or CDs at bedtime
Listen to classical music, a story, nature sounds, or a meditation tape. It can be very soothing to lie quietly in the darkness and listen to peaceful sounds together.

Planting good dreams
Draw a circle on your child’s forehead “to put the good dreams in”. For example “Dream that you’re riding your bike and wearing your red helmet.

Proud moments
To end children’s days on a positive note ask them at bedtime to share something they did that day that they are proud of.
Monster spray
When there are “monsters” in the bedroom or closet spray a plastic spray bottle with a colorful label with water and let the child spray under the bed, in the closet, and anywhere else monsters may lurk.

Touch the darkness
Open the front door and reach out your hands to “touch” the night before bedtime. Say goodnight to the moon if you can see it.

Good-night family tree
Say good-night to all the people your child loves. The circle of family and friends will change as the child grows older to include child care providers and teachers. End with “Good Night to ALL the people we love”.

Bedtime stories
Tell family stories or made up stories or read books in bed or on a comfortable sofa or chair. This time can be made more special by having a “bed-time blanket” that you wrap up in for this occasion only. Use special bookmarks you buy or make, or a beautiful piece of ribbon.

Map ritual
Touch a place on a map and talk about the language, climate, history and customs seen there.

In-bed massage
Rubbing your child’s back, neck feet or scalp can be extremely comforting and is a great way to relax and let go of the day.

Tuck in favorite dolls or stuffed animals.

Bedtime prayers
Prayers can take on whatever form you’re comfortable with. It can be a moment of quiet meditation or offering up thanks for the good things that have happened. Prayers are a wonderful way to pass on religious traditions and beliefs, and help teach a child empathy and gratitude.
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FAMILY NIGHT GUIDELINES

Strong families are more committed to each other. Look at a strong family and you’re likely to see one with many family traditions. Celebrating family night each week brings a sense of belonging, familiarity, routine, and connectedness to family members. It can be a time to teach communication skills, good judgment, a sense of responsibility and self-discipline. Family Nights may include similar elements like prayers and snacks but may also include some family business, such as dealing with schedules, finances or behavior.

Celebrating family nights
• Encourages family members to spend time together. Quality time together is necessary to build and maintain strong family relationships.
• Allows family members to share the ups and downs of life, support one another when problems arise and celebrate the successes when they occur.
• Helps to establish and communicate what is really important to a family (values, belief system).
• Provides a means of working out the family’s interpersonal dynamics, dealing with conflict, hurt feelings and misunderstandings.
• Provides a sense of sharing love, laughter, loyalty, unity and a sense of commitment.

Ideas for family night
- Make a special dinner
- Share best thing that happened to you all week
- Go over the week’s outings, sports practices, medical appointments, etc. with a calendar
- Give compliments and concerns
- Give out allowance
- Eat dessert
- Play a game or activity (allow each family member a turn to choose the activity) such as:
  a. Make beeswax candles      e. Take a walk together      h. Work on a fun project
  b. Stepping stones           f. Go on a bike ride       i. Have a campfire (make S’mores)
  c. Scavenger hunts          g. Make ice cream        j. Go to a movie
  d. Board games
RITUAL RECIPES

According to Meg Cox, author of The Heart of a Family: Searching America for New Traditions and The Book of New Family Traditions, research and experience suggest families should have one solid ritual of connection daily, with a modest weekly family ritual recommended.

Make it personal. Take something from your family’s history or passions to create a ritual that will be meaningful specifically for you.

Your best chance of success is to keep it simple and to be playful. If you set a tone of having fun, and of everyone having their say, then family members won’t feel awkward or too embarrassed to participate.

Examples of daily rituals
1. Have at least one meal together at the table
2. Say grace
3. Enlist everyone’s help to prepare dinner and clean up
4. Hug before everyone leaves in different directions for the day
5. Bedtime rituals

Examples of weekly rituals
1. Family Night
2. Pizza and Movie Night
3. Going out for a treat on Fridays (bakery, ice cream, playing at the park)
4. Sunday morning pancakes
5. Add candles and centerpiece to the table
6. Baking day
7. One on one with a parent
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All major milestones, accomplishments, and relevant holidays deserve to be celebrated, leaving enormous leeway to families about which occasions and how many they mark.

**Examples of milestones, accomplishments**

1. First day of school
2. Last day of school
3. Driver’s license
4. Promotions
5. Seasons
6. Decorate the house for holidays
7. Graduations
8. Sports (personal best)
9. Report cards (personal best)
10. Rewarding good work
11. Birthdays
12. New Baby

She also suggests applying rituals as a corrective whenever there’s a bumpy spot in the regular routine. Transitions (going to child care or school and coming home afterward, new baby, medical appointments, starting homework, the death of a pet, a move) can be very difficult for young children. Substituting a fun or silly ritual can miraculously smooth over rough patches.

**Examples of transition rituals**

1. Special handshake or hug
2. Sing a special song
3. Daily wish
4. Reading story books on the transition
5. Have on hand a healthy snack for the ride home from school or doing errands
6. Special time
7. Game
8. Chant
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TEN GOOD THINGS RITUALS DO FOR CHILDREN

★ Impart a sense of identity
★ Provide comfort and security
★ Help to navigate change
★ Teach values
★ Teach practical skills
★ Solve problems
★ Keep alive a sense of departed family members
★ Pass on ethnic or religious heritage
★ Help heal from loss or trauma
★ Generate wonderful memories