

# VIP Value In Parenting

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## Celebrating Your Family: Routines, Rituals & Traditions

By Virginia Brown, Parent Education Ministry; Kay DeLong, Good Samaritan Outreach, and Helene McArdle, Action Toward Independence

As parents, we are constantly looking for ways to make our family life enjoyable and conflict free (or almost!) Routines bring order to our otherwise hectic world, and help young children to understand and follow the family "rules." Every family is different; it is our individual routines, rituals and traditions that help us to celebrate who we are.

### Routines:

**Procedures or courses of action regularly followed.**

- ◆ Children feel safe and secure when they know what will come next in their daily life. Invite your children to help set up the activities that will make up their routines. Keep the order of the activities the same. The amount of time spent, and the time the routine begins, can be flexible.
- For example, every morning your child wakes up, gets dressed, brushes their teeth and washes their face, then comes down to breakfast. On a weekend, they might wake up later and spend a longer time at breakfast, but the order of the activities remains the same.
- ◆ Following routines can help establish order and reduce tension. Routines help to establish clear expectations and remind children of limits in a way that doesn't involve yelling or nagging. Most young children try to please their parents. Children will want to maintain the routine if parents remember to praise them.
  - ◆ Research has found that sharing meals with your family is a practical way to keep in touch with your children. It takes special effort to do this today because of our busy lives. Take time to share at least one meal together a day, it is worth it! Involving your children in the routine of mealtime helps them feel important and can cut your work down too!

For example, very young children can help to decorate the table with their artwork, count and place napkins on the table, or select side dishes. Older children can set the table, assist in meal preparation, menu planning, shopping and clean up.

- ◆ It is not the amount of time spent eating together, but the quality of the time spent sharing the events of the day that is important. Do not expect young children to sit quietly for long periods of time. Keep mealtimes pleasant, and discuss problems away from the table.

**Hint:** Rather than asking your children about their day, tell about your day and they will compete to tell you about theirs!

### Recipe for A Family Ritual

- Think...**What is important to your family?
- Talk...**with family members about what you want to celebrate. Include family members that may not live with you. Maybe there is an interesting tradition waiting to be found.
- Plan...**with family members how to celebrate. Choose a date, time, and specific activity. Should others be invited? When the planning is shared, the ritual belongs to everyone. Have Fun! You could be creating a new tradition!



### Rituals:

**Planned activities that celebrate life and make a particular moment special and different from every other moment.**

- ◆ Good family rituals sometimes just happen, but more often than not they are planned. A bedtime ritual can make breaking with daytime pleasures very sweet. If possible, avoid TV close to bedtime, since it may cause sleep problems (*Parents Magazine*, Jan. 2000). Reading to your children, or sharing a song or story before bed helps to quiet them. This makes the transition from play or homework to sleep easier.
- Hint:** Make the last half hour of the day as routine as possible: bath, snack, brush teeth, read, talk, share a prayer or song, or just say "I love you," and end the ritual. By keeping bedtime at the same hour each night, children learn to automatically "wind-down" and adults are given the time needed to celebrate the end of the day and plan for tomorrow.
- ◆ There are times when death, separation, moves and other sad events enter the lives of children. It is very important that parents speak to their children about these sad events using simple and honest words. Children should be allowed to ask questions of you when faced with a sad and potentially life changing event. Children will naturally be most concerned with how this will affect their own lives. "Now that daddy doesn't live with us anymore, who will get me my cereal in the morning?" These concerns may seem simple to a parent, but they are critical to the feeling of stability in the life of a young child. Children need to participate in rituals that help them remember, and stay connected, to the person (or pet!) who died or left.

(Continued on other side)

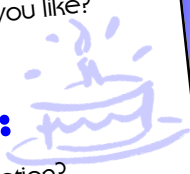
# Celebrating Your Family: Routines, Rituals & Traditions Continued from other side

## Parents, ask your children:

What makes our family unique and different from other families?  
 What are some special things our family does that you like?  
 What is your favorite family celebration?

## Parents, ask yourself:

What values are being taught in our family celebration?  
 Do the members of our family enjoy the family traditions?  
 Should we create a new routine, ritual or tradition?



Hint: Children can be helped by telling stories about the person, drawing or displaying pictures, or continuing rituals in which their loved one was involved.

- ◆ In the case of parental separation, it is helpful if both parents maintain as many of their past routines as possible. Family rituals may need to be adapted, but they don't need to be abandoned.

## Traditions:

### Passing on personal history, beliefs and values through story telling and family rituals.

- ◆ Traditions are important to our family and cultural identity because they help us to teach children in fun and concrete ways. A family may pay extra attention to a member when there is a special event such as a birthday or graduation. Many families have cultural or religious traditions that they hope to share and pass on. The preparation of special foods, decorations, or dress we choose for special events and celebrations contribute to these traditions. When the type of ritual or celebration becomes a pattern over time, a family tradition has been started.

- ◆ Everyday traditions can be the simplest and best of all! Some families have a special way to greet each other or say goodnight. Others have unique rituals to address the beginning of school (a favorite meal), the start of summer (a picnic at a nearby park), or winter's first snow (making a snow person or "angels"). There is no need to wait for a major holiday or family reunion to observe our traditions. Traditions can be created through the repetition of our everyday routines and rituals, and help our children learn to celebrate the simpler things in life.

- ◆ You can use rituals and traditions as a fun way to teach values. You may already have such "centers of values" in your home! Look around. It is often just a matter of highlighting and naming our basic family values: love, respect, unity responsibility, learning, and faith, to name a few.

For example, the Rodriguez family has refrigerator art held with homemade magnets. They say "we love our family" by including photos of a newborn cousin and a postcard from their vacation with their aunt.

During the holidays each year, members of the Lewis family make special bread from Grandma's famous recipe. The family is honoring their grandmother while passing on a valued tradition.

- ◆ As parents we are our children's first and most important teachers. The values we share with them when they are young will guide them through their lifetime. By modeling these values in our daily lives, and gently reminding children of these values through their use in our family routines, rituals and traditions, we are helping to build a more caring and compassionate world.

**For more information on this topic, call:**  
 Cornell Cooperative Extension: 344-1234  
 Parent Education Ministry: 342-0908  
 Rainbows: 562-6808



# Have Fun Matching Routines, Rituals & Traditions!

Contributed by Orange County Youth Leadership Congress

**Birthday**



Having fun / Bonding with family

**Graduation**



I'm special

**Going to Grandma's**



Accomplishment

**Anniversary**



Daily communication / sharing time

**Reading to Children**



Family tradition / ties

**Mealtime**



Commitment

**Family vacation**

Learning, literacy

## VIP Value In Parenting

For more information on parenting education and/or the Orange County Parenting Coalition, contact Cornell Cooperative Extension at 914 - 344 - 1234.  
[www.cce.cornell.edu/orange](http://www.cce.cornell.edu/orange)



**Editorial Staff:** Denyse Variano: Cornell Cooperative Extension, Orange County; Stephanie Sosnowski, Maternal Infant Services Network.  
**Graphics:** Nancy Karp, Cornell Cooperative Extension, O.C.  
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