

# CONNECTIONS

A NEWSLETTER ABOUT FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS & PERSONAL GROWTH

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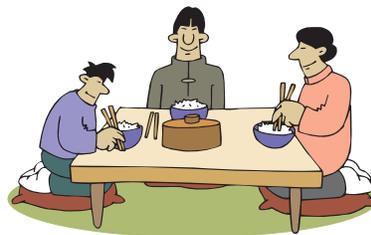
*"Whatever the method of implementing change—direct, indirect, or through discovery—there needs to be an ongoing process of monitoring the ritual and revising it if necessary"*

*William J. Doherty, Ph.D.*

## PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS

# 10 Tradition/Ritual Idea Starters for Families

Family traditions and rituals have been shown to improve the lives of children, marriages, and families. There are many types of family traditions and rituals that are often found within the context of religion, spirituality, culture, and family history. Here are some ideas that will help families during this holiday season remember or create family traditions and rituals.



**1 Meal Time** Eat a meal together on a daily or weekly basis.

**2 Family Activities** Plan a family activity together on a weekly or monthly basis.

**3 Walks** Take a walk with your family, spouse, and/or child on a regular basis.

**4 Parent-Child Time** Take out time to spend "alone time" with each son or daughter on a regular basis.

**5 Music** Spend time listening, sharing, and/or playing music as a family during a holiday or special occasion.



**6 Service** Take time as a family to plan on how to help another family during the holiday season.

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FROM THE DESK OF

*Charlotte Shoup Olsen*



# Family Rituals & Legacies

The holiday season is upon us when connecting to family often takes priority. Thus, this month's newsletter is about family rituals and family legacies and what all this means for the health and well-being of families. We wish you a holiday season in which you can rejoice in whatever station of life you

are in. May you (and the families you serve) have meaningful times to connect and reflect with those special persons in your life.

Charlotte Shoup Olsen

W. Jared DuPree

## *Answers to Questions from Kansas County Extension Agents*

### Question:

Just exactly what is the Healthy Marriage Initiative that I hear so much about? What does it mean to Extension?

### Answer:

During the past few years, the federal government has initiated a **Healthy Marriage Initiative** through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services through the Administration for Children and Families. The purpose of this initiative is about "helping couples, who have chosen marriage for themselves, gain greater access to marriage education services, on a voluntary basis, where they can acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain a healthy marriage." In practical terms, the initiative involves: implementing demonstration projects, emphasizing marriage in Federal programs, and conducting research.

At the community level, the federal government has made available grant monies to community coalitions to deliver marriage education services, often to specific target audiences such as limited resource newly married parents, unmarried

parents, couples in general, and more. It is anticipated that more grant dollars will be available in the near future, particularly through the House welfare reauthorization bill.

What does this mean for Extension? It appears that being part of a community coalition with numerous agencies and interest groups who have a desire to deliver marriage education services is the first step. If a coalition is not in existence, this would be the first step. The next step is determining the coalition's mission and vision and who it would like to serve. For example, the metro Kansas City area (Kansas and Missouri) has been working for the past year in pulling a coalition together to be prepared when a new request for proposals is distributed. Chiquita Miller of Wyandotte County has been the Kansas Extension rep along with support of Jim Lindquist, the Metropolitan Area Extension Director. A workshop will be presented at the February FCS Agent Update to help those of you who are interested in knowing more about the Healthy Marriage Initiative and its possibilities for your local community.

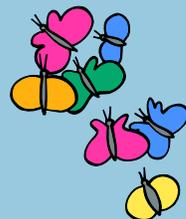
# Extension Spotlight

## Margaret Phillips

Margaret Phillips has an extensive Extension career in the state of Kansas, beginning with her employment as a County Extension Family and Consumer Sciences Agent in Jefferson County for three years and a 4-H Agent in Ford County for six years. More recently, she spent 18 years as the South Central Area Specialist in Family and Consumer Sciences and during the last year and a half, she has assumed the responsibility of Assistant State Program Leader for Family and Consumer Sciences.

Her post-secondary education comes out of Kansas State University—first a bachelor's in Vocational Home Economics, a master's in Adult and Community Education, and doctoral studies in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in Educational Leadership.

Margaret's penchant for leadership is evident in the things that she enjoys in her professional Extension life. She likes to try new things and is an eager learner. She also relishes working with people with a variety of responsibilities in KSRE to make things happen, but she considers it a challenge, too. Margaret expresses a keen desire to see more resources available in the Spanish language and more attention given to potential Spanish-speaking audiences in the state. To increase her own knowledge base in that area, she recently represented K-State Research and Extension, along with Mary Higgins, in attending the first ever National Extension Hispanic Conference, held in San Juan, Puerto Rico. One of her aspirations is to become conversant in Spanish.



One of the most rewarding aspects of being in Extension over the years is "seeing things applied that I have taught over the years, especially with family members (from the community)."

Margaret Phillips

Margaret's hand can be seen in several projects coming out of the Family and Consumer Sciences Assistant Director's office in the past year and a half. The *Young Families Newsletter* is back as an electronic resource for Extension Agents in Family and Consumer Sciences. A huge project was creating, gathering data, and conducting the analysis of the Family & Consumer Sciences Needs Survey and the Professional Training Needs Survey. The Needs Survey involved counties collecting information from numerous community members to give a broad base perspective for planning five-year programs of work. The Training Survey is being used by Extension Specialists and Administrators for long range planning in providing training to FCS faculty.

On a more personal level, Margaret has two young adult children, both of whom are beginning a new stage of adult life as her son and daughter each have graduated from

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## Family Legacies

Understanding and exploring one's family background can be a powerful experience. A number of family theories in the field use family history as an integral part of the growing process. Bowenian theory in particular focuses on family legacies, patterns, and self-differentiation.

One helpful way to understand your personal family is through a three generation genogram. A genogram is similar to a family tree, yet, it adds new symbols that represent communication, levels of closeness, difficulties, and strengths. A good book that explains genograms is Monica McGoldrick's book entitled, "Genograms: Assessment and Intervention." Here are a few definitions that are helpful in thinking about your family:

### FAMILY PATTERNS

Each family has certain patterns of behavior. As you contemplate about your family, think about positive and negative patterns that have occurred. For example, there are communication patterns, marital patterns, discipline patterns, work patterns, gender role patterns, religious patterns, health patterns, emotional patterns, and more.

### FAMILY LEGACIES

Family legacies are positive family patterns that you would like to keep in your family and carry on to the next generation.

### SELF-DIFFERENTIATION

This is the ability to separate yourself from the negative patterns that occur in your

family. In a sense, self-differentiation allows you to become your own self. This may mean you still agree with many of your family's ways, but you agree because you want to. You do not feel pressured to be one way over the other. You are making decisions as an adult in regards to self-identity, self-esteem, spirituality, politics, values, etc. Self-differentiation is important to move forward through each generation.

### TRANSITIONAL CHARACTER

A transitional character is a person that comes along in a family and changes in a way that creates a new pattern for generations to come. For example, if there is a history of abusive fathers in a family, and a son comes along and chooses not to be like his father and grandfather, then he becomes a transitional character as he influences his children and children's children. This can be very powerful because of how many people are connected to the influence of the transitional character.

Take some time to think about your family. You may want to do some family history. The internet is a wonderful source for family history searches. The following websites provide useful tools for such searches.



- [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)
- [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- [www.familyhistory.com](http://www.familyhistory.com)
- [www.geneology.com](http://www.geneology.com)

This holiday season can become more special as you examine the strengths, areas of improvement, and future directions of your past, present, and future family.

## Ten Advantages of Family Traditions

Family traditions and rituals can influence our families in positive ways. During this holiday season, experiencing family rituals can be helpful in solidifying the family unit. Rituals and traditions may include often eating together as a family, participating in a family activity on a regular basis, celebrating a holiday or event as a family on a yearly basis, and/or doing particular things each year during a special time. Ten advantages of participating in family rituals/traditions gleaned from research literature are:

- |          |                                                                                                              |
|----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1</b> | Family rituals and traditions tend to protect high-risk teens from unhealthy behavior.                       |
| <b>2</b> | Family rituals can raise self-esteem in children and adolescents.                                            |
| <b>3</b> | Family rituals tend to help those that are immigrants to a new country and/or area.                          |
| <b>4</b> | Family traditions can help provide meaning and texture to personal and family identity.                      |
| <b>5</b> | Family rituals have been found to increase levels of physical health and well-being.                         |
| <b>6</b> | Family rituals have been found to help those with poor health cope with stressors.                           |
| <b>7</b> | Family rituals provide more order and structure to families which helps in providing security and stability. |
| <b>8</b> | Family rituals have been shown to reduce mental health issues in teens.                                      |

**9** Family rituals have been shown to have long-term positive effects in dealing with stressors that arise throughout the family lifespan.

**10** Family rituals have been shown to increase family and marital satisfaction.

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## 10 Tradition/Ritual Idea Starters for Families

**7 Remembering** Spend time talking about past events or your childhood holidays with your family.

**8 Family History** Explore your family's past together by asking relatives questions or looking up family history.



**9 Family Traditions** Create or plan a new family tradition that will be celebrated each year.



**10 Food** Prepare a special meal together as a family that represents your culture, history, and/or celebration of a holiday/event.

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## Extension Spotlight

college and recently married. As a single person household, Margaret has numerous outside interests that give her much satisfaction such as quilting, gardening, neighboring, and providing long-distance caregiving to her elderly mother.

As Margaret looks down the road, she is looking forward to retirement and spending time with family, but in the meantime, she wants to continue connecting with people and working together for positive results in Family & Consumer Sciences.