
CELEBRATE YOUR FAMILY

“Celebrate Your Family” is intended to help your family develop its strengths. The only two requirements for celebrating your family are a desire to do something that will strengthen the family further, and a family commitment to set aside some time for strength-building activities.

The strong family stands apart from others. One characteristic that sets it apart from other families is its cohesiveness. The members of a strong family have deep emotional ties with each other and a keen sense of belonging. They think alike about the important aspects of life.

One of the outstanding ways in which a family becomes strong is by cultivating family rituals. A ritual is any repeated, shared activity that is full of meaning and satisfying for all family members. Many adults fondly and vividly recall something their family did when they were young. One woman remembers that her mother always read her a story at bedtime. As she looks back on this bedtime ritual, she recalls how secure she felt. Another person remembers that every Christmas he and his brother always iced a special kind of cookie. This simple ritual continued until the two boys left home because it held a special meaning for them. It gave them personal satisfaction and was a sign of the bond and love between them and their mother. A 40-year-old man who now has two children observed, “Rituals are family keepsakes that live in your heart.”

In many families rituals develop or arise with the coming of children. The bedtime ritual made a vivid impression on the woman when she was young. This impression lives on. Today the woman is a single parent, and she continues the ritual with her child. It fosters in her child a sense of pride and “rightness,” as it did for the mother when she was young. Today, the bedtime ritual gives her daughter an important sense of security. The mother remembers that she felt this was the “right” way to go to sleep.

Rituals are important not so much for what is said or done but for the results they yield, the sense of “oneness” that grows out of a shared experience and the feeling of rightness that comes from its repetition.

Rituals differ from family to family. Commonly, rituals are thought of only around holidays or special days. For example, one family has a picnic every Fourth of July; another goes for the last swim of the summer on Labor Day.

Rituals should not be limited to holidays or special occasions. One person who studies families remarked, “Families that have the strongest ties have the most rituals.” In one family the father prepares breakfast every Sunday morning. He has always done this, and to hear his children describe it, he always will: “It’s just the way we do it. We kids work with Dad. It’s our time to be with him. It’s the way our family is.”

Some people feel, maybe rightly so, that our lifestyles—the way we live family life in today’s busy times—work against rituals. Strong families wisely cultivate rituals. They recognize that rituals provide the sense of continuity, understanding, and love that strengthens family closeness.

Rituals give family members the opportunity for pleasant association, the “pauses of satisfaction” so vital in our families’ lives. In a word, rituals touch the heart of the family; they give members a reason to feel good about their family and each other. Most important, rituals are symbols of how family members feel about each other.

