Rituals that bind

Rituals are those unique family activities or celebrations that bring people together. Strong families build up their own rituals and traditions that help define them and set them apart.

Birthdays, Mother’s and Father’s Day, Christmas, Bah mitzvahs are just some of the many rituals and traditions that families enjoy. By definition they are cast in stone and not put aside when life gets busy.

Rituals can also be as simple as the way a parent habitually says to a child ‘I love you’ each day as he goes to school or the bed-time story routine that so many children love. The permanence and uniqueness of rituals give them much of their significance.

Australian psychologist Andrew Fuller describes family rituals as the “coat hooks upon which we hang our family memories.” It is little wonder that when families begin to disintegrate it is generally rituals that are the first things to go.

It is strange how teenagers will complain about having to come to family celebrations yet they will be less than pleased if they are cancelled or even changed in some way. Strong family rituals connect teenagers not merely to each other within a family but they also anchor them to their childhoods. So they tend to celebrate birthdays and special days in the same time honoured ways well into adolescence and beyond.

Some parents establish their own rituals to mark different ages of children. For instance, a child may get his big bike when he is ten and at thirteen he has a special meal with both parents to mark his movement into adolescence. These rites of passage traditions are fast becoming a feature of many modern families as parents consider appropriate markers for different ages.

As families become increasingly similar in this media age it is important to maintain those distinctive traditions and rituals that make each family special and signify a child’s significance within his primary social group – his family.

TRY THIS...

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

To develop rituals that bind your family together:

1. Have regular family mealtimes that everyone is expected to attend. Family mealtime is a simple but powerful ritual that brings people together.
2. Have a regular one-on-one activity that involves each child such as a bedtime story or a weekly walk that you both can look forward to.
3. Celebrate your child’s thirteenth birthday in a unique or special way.
4. Ask your children about the rituals, special occasions and celebrations that they most enjoy.

ACTION PLAN

First Step . . .
Next Step . . .

For more ideas about promoting resilience in children visit www.parentingideas.com.au

QUOTE

‘Every ceremony or rite has a value if it is performed without alteration. A ceremony is a book in which a great deal is written. Anyone who understands can read it. One rite often contains more than a hundred books.’

GEORGE GURDJIEFF