



## Traditions Can Strengthen Families

It's the holiday season again, and here we are doing a lot of the same holiday-type things we've done for the past umpteen years, and will keep doing over and over and...over again. Is this some kind of madness?

Not really. We're humans, and one of our traits is the need, not just the desire, to incorporate certain repetitive goings-on into our lives. We have several names for these actions: traditions, rituals, and customs are the main ones.

There are important reasons, psychologists say, that we do such things every year, such as eat certain foods, decorate evergreen trees, and light candles. These and other traditions help us define who we are. They give us a sense of belonging and well-being. They link us to the past and help teach our children about their culture and heritage.

Kids especially need rituals. As they grow, rituals become symbols that give reassurance of their safety, their own self-worth, and the dependability of their day and parent's attention. Because of the symbolism, a child may still want Mom or Dad to continue placing money under his pillow, even after he outgrows his belief in the tooth fairy, for example.

Traditions enhance a family's togetherness, and some are just plain fun! For instance, reading special stories to your children at bedtime, taking them to Saturday brunch once a month, or making birthdays "breakfast in bed" days.

### Some hints:

- The specific activity is less important than the fact that it exists and that children and parents recognize it as an important part of their family's identity.
- If a child loses interest in a tradition, creative ways may be devised to make it attractive again. For instance, if she gets grumpy about going to Grandma's for the traditional holiday dinner, an assignment to design the dinner table place cards for each guest may make her feel important and restore enthusiasm.
- Give your traditions a name. It could be Soup and Salad Day or Family Fun Night.
- Build traditions around your family history. Keeping photo albums, adding pictures to them as the family grows, and looking over them on special occasions can give children a sense of stability and family continuity.
- Listen to your children. Because they know when things have "always been done that way," they may be more adept than their parents at identifying routines that can become family rituals.
- Draw on special talents of parents and kids—music, dancing, art, puppets, magic, etc.—in creating traditions. These talents, when shared together, can help families together in unique and special ways.