

INSIGHTS

When young people challenge family traditions



Strong families develop their own traditions and rituals that define them and bind members together. They are the coat hooks upon which we hang our family memories. By definition, they are permanent and not set aside when life gets busy. They also link young people to their childhoods at a stage when everything around them is changing.

Develop traditions early

Family traditions are relatively easy to develop when children are pre-school or primary school aged. Parent approval is important to most children, so they will generally fit with family traditions and rituals that they enjoy and provide a relaxed, calm atmosphere.

Young people can challenge family traditions

Adolescents are likely to challenge many of their family's traditions and rituals, which is often difficult for parents to encounter. Questions about, or even defiance towards the way you act as a family can come suddenly and be a shock to parents. On one hand, you know that your young person's challenge is healthy and part of their search for identity separate from their parents. On the other hand, to discover that the child you brought up to respect family and even cultural traditions and rituals no longer wants to follow the family or cultural line can really sting.

Know the traditions that are negotiable

If part of the healthy development of young people means stepping away, albeit, temporarily, from their family it helps to establish those traditions that are negotiable and those that are non-negotiable. For example, if family birthdays are important then your young person may no longer need to attend their aunt's birthday but they need to attend the birthday celebration of their immediate family members. "This is non-negotiable!" should become part of your family's proprietary language.

Give young people some leeway

Giving your young person some leeway in family activities is recognition that they are growing up, but this shouldn't be confused with growing away. Recent studies reveal that young people value being part of supportive family, but they want their family life to accommodate their burgeoning independence.

Make family meals non-negotiable

This writer recommends that shared mealtimes should be non-negotiable in families. There is a correlation between good mental health in young people and those families that share a meal at least five times a week. A young person can too easily drop out of their family unless there is a tradition or ritual that keeps them connected.

parenting * ideas

Healthy families are built around traditions and rituals. It's useful to approach the concept of family traditions with a mix of flexibility to accommodate a young person wish for more independence and firmness to hold the line on those rituals that are essential to your family's identity and your young person's wellbeing.



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Michael Grose, founder of Parenting Ideas, is one of Australia's leading parenting educators. He's an award-winning speaker and the author of 12 books for parents including *Spoonfed Generation*, and the bestselling *Why First Borns Rule the World and Last Borns Want to Change It*. Michael is a former teacher with 15 years experience, and has 30 years experience in parenting education. He also holds a Master of Educational Studies from Monash University specialising in parenting education.