

INSIGHTS

Why family rituals really matter



Family rituals strengthen the sense of warm connectedness in families. This makes sense, given that the number one biological need for every human is the hunger to belong, and to be accepted, valued and loved.

The disruption of life in 2020 saw many families unable to go about their normal activities, and for many, family rituals reclaimed their valuable position. For some, it was simply going for walks together, riding bikes together, baking, or watching movies together complete with home-made popcorn.

So how can families create and maintain small rituals that make such a difference?

Turn routines into rituals

Bedtime routines that include such things as reading to your children, singing special bedtime songs or even just lying beside your child do far more than help them to fall asleep. When these routines are repeated, they create neural pathways which enhance loving connection. As a nanny to several precious little ones, I absolutely love being a part of their bedtime rituals.

Reign in the chaos

Family rituals bring a degree of predictability and certainty into our sometimes chaotic lives. They are important for teenagers as they provide a sense of control at a time of change and challenge. Families who are struggling with any uncertainty and stress should regularly connect with a much-loved board game or family movie and dive into it with enthusiasm. Leave work and worry behind and spend a couple of hours with those you love the most.

Create greeting rituals

Greeting and goodbye rituals within families are also important. How you welcome and reconnect to children after a day away shows them that you have missed them and still love them. With little ones, some parents leave a kiss on their child's palm. For others there are special handshakes. I can still remember my dad saying goodbye to us with the oldie but goodie "See you later alligator!" To which we naturally replied, "in a while, crocodile!" This is a ritual that happens now with my grandchildren.

As an authorised celebrant, I have conducted many funerals and one of the things that brings joy to broken hearts are the shared memories of family rituals. The repeated nature of ritual helps to anchor memories deeply in our minds. I remember a beautiful funeral for a man where everyone wore a beanie and a scarf, including his youngest grandchild. This simple act was a nod to the fact that whenever this grandfather watched football on TV, he always wore a beanie and a scarf and so did anyone else who was watching with him. A simple but powerful act.

Never underestimate the importance of family rituals in your home.



Maggie Dent

Commonly known as the 'queen of common sense', Maggie Dent has become one of Australia's favourite parenting authors and educators, with a particular interest in the early years, adolescence and resilience. She has written seven major books including the bestselling *Mothering Our Boys* and her 2020 release, *From Boys to Men*. Maggie is host of the ABC podcast, [Parental As Anything](#). *She is the mother of four sons and a very grateful grandmother.* For further details visit maggiedent.com