What Are Family Rituals?

It’s sometimes difficult to distinguish between rituals and [routines](https://biglifejournal.com/blogs/blog/create-positive-morning-routine-kids). According to psychologist [Barbara H. Fiese](http://familyresiliency.illinois.edu/barbara-h-fiese), rituals symbolically communicate the idea that “this is who we are” as a group, providing continuity in meaning across generations.

*Routines*, on the other hand, are a way of communicating, “This is what needs to be done.” For example, giving your child a bath at 7:00, followed by bedtime at 7:30, is a routine. But if you incorporate personalized moments like a special kiss, handshake, or song, you can transform the routine into a meaningful ritual.

Why Are Family Rituals Important?

Rituals allow families to [slow down](https://biglifejournal.com/blogs/blog/5-fun-mindfulness-activities-children-breathing-exercises) and [connect](https://biglifejournal.com/blogs/blog/connect-child-activities-love-languages), and they’re associated with all sorts of powerful benefits. Fiese and her colleagues at Stanford conducted a [review](http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2002/12/rituals.aspx) of 50 years of research on family rituals, published in the American Psychological Association’s (APA) *Journal of Family Psychology*.

According to the review, both [family](https://biglifejournal.com/blogs/blog/activity-sense-belonging-family-manifesto) routines and rituals provide stability and are associated with [adolescents’ sense of personal identity](https://biglifejournal.com/blogs/blog/build-self-esteem-confidence-teens), children’s health, academic achievement, and marital satisfaction.

Maintaining these routines and rituals even during times of transition like divorce can lower levels of conflict and help children adjust to change, protecting them from the proposed risks of nontraditional families.

If you’re interested in starting some family rituals (or adding to your current list), take a look at the 41 best ideas below.

Rituals That Teach Responsibility

Rituals can be a fun way to teach your child responsibility.

*1. Assigned Tasks -*For example, assign each family member a specific task when setting the table: one family member clears the table, another sets out napkins, one distributes silverware, and a fourth lights some candles.

You can do the same when preparing breakfast, lunch, or dinner, perhaps to the sounds of our [“Love Yourself Mix”](https://open.spotify.com/user/b2czwfsrff4aqxig6owak4fjb/playlist/2VWUW2sPYR9BSn5W4xQ9De?utm_source=Big+Life+Journal+Printables+%26+Resources&utm_campaign=26c8f9a66a-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_02_09&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_62aad05539-26c8f9a66a-223551117&mc_cid=26c8f9a66a&mc_eid=519bee98e3) on Spotify.  The word “[chore](https://biglifejournal.com/blogs/blog/effective-tips-kids-chores-responsibility)” has a negative connotation, but you can make chores a positive family ritual that teaches responsibility.

In many cases, kids don’t mind helping out - it makes them feel special and capable! And family chores can teach your child that your family is a team that operates best when each member contributes.

*2. Rotating Chores -*For instance, have a rotating chore chart on a whiteboard that changes each Sunday. Or you could write a variety of chores on Popsicle sticks, then have each family member draw a stick or two to determine their chores for the week.

*3. Designated Chore Time -* Designate a particular time each week (usually Saturday or Sunday afternoon) when the entire family comes together to clean the house. You can play music, talk, laugh, dance around - but the chores must get done!

*4. Collaborative Projects -* Finding projects that the entire family can collaborate on is also a lot of fun, whether you’re shelling peas, doing one of the activities from our [Growth Mindset Activity Kit](https://biglifejournal.com/collections/printables/products/growth-mindset-activity-kit-pdf), painting a wall, or constructing a crib for an upcoming addition.

These rituals show your children that hard work can be fun, and they’ll learn about responsibility from a young age.

Rituals That Promote Kindness

Rituals like the loving [kindness](https://biglifejournal.com/blogs/blog/raise-kind-caring-children) meditation and volunteering as a family can teach your child the importance of [kindness and compassion](https://biglifejournal.com/blogs/blog/kindness-books-activities-children).

*5. Loving Kindness Meditation -*It involves thinking of loved ones and sending them positive thoughts or “good-hearted wishes.” You can eventually expand the positive thoughts to more neutral people in your life aswell.

The four traditional phrases are, *“May you feel safe. May you feel happy. May you feel healthy. May you live with ease.”* But the exact well-wishes your family uses aren’t important; it’s about generating feelings of kindness and warmth.

Research shows that the loving kindness meditation results in increased[mindfulness](https://biglifejournal.com/blogs/blog/5-fun-mindfulness-activities-children-breathing-exercises), purpose in life, and positive social behaviors, like generosity.

*6. Family Volunteering -* Find a place you’d like to [volunteer as a family](https://biglifejournal.com/blogs/blog/raise-kind-caring-children), such as a nursing home, an animal shelter, or a soup kitchen.

Alternatively, have your children help with projects like donating food, clothing items, school supplies, or toys.

When you volunteer as a family, you set a great example for your children and teach them to demonstrate compassion and kindness.

Rituals That Boost Positivity

Try the suggestions below to help your family [de-stress](https://biglifejournal.com/blogs/blog/help-children-cope-stress), reflect, and ultimately [boost positivity](https://biglifejournal.com/blogs/blog/children-positive-attitude).

*7. Family Cuddle Time -*[Kelly Holmes](https://happyyouhappyfamily.com/after-school-routine/), author of *Happy You, Happy Family*, found an after-school/after-work ritual that helps her family slow down and spend genuine quality time each day. Every day when her family arrives home, they pile into bed together and cuddle for five minutes.

They call it “family cuddle time” or “cozy up in bed time.” They spend the five minutes cuddling, talking, and laughing together as a family.

As a result, their evenings are happier and less stressful. Family members laugh more, help more, and argue less.

*8. Reflecting on the Day -*Another element of family cuddle time is a discussion about each family member’s day. However, this can be incorporated into just about any ritual, including dinner and bedtime rituals.

Sometimes, talking to your kids about their day isn’t easy. They may be hesitant to share or dismissive of your questions. Use the following tips to make the most out of this ritual:

* Make sure you’re not using “yes” or “no” questions. Instead, ask questions that begin with “how” or “why.”
* Make the questions fun! It shouldn’t feel like a test, and your child shouldn’t feel put on the spot.
* Listen to your kids instead of guiding them to give any particular answer. If your child responds with, “I don’t know,” explain that there’s no right or wrong answer to your question.

Family sharing rituals can also be more specific, like having everyone say one thing they’re grateful for at Sunday dinner, or sharing one success and one challenge each day.

*9. “High, Low, and Buffalo*” - Another idea is “[High, Low, and Buffalo](http://sunshine-parenting.com/2012/05/17/sharing-our-highs-lows-and-buffaloes/)” suggested by Audrey Monke, summer camp director and mother of five. Each member of the family shares the high point of their day, the low point of their day, and a buffalo (anything else they would like to share).

Open communication, laughter, and understanding will promote [positivity](https://biglifejournal.com/blogs/blog/children-positive-attitude) that brings your family closer.

Rituals That Build Strong Family

Bedtime and dinnertime rituals are among the best ways to foster *connection* with your family members.

Bedtime rituals give you a chance to connect with your children and help them relax before they go to sleep. You may want to try some of the ideas below, or a combination.

*10. Massage*- If your child responds well to touch, end each evening with a calming massage before bed.

*11. Songs*- Choose a few favorite songs to use as “goodnight songs,” or have your child pick a song each night.

*12. Stories*- As with songs, you may have a few favorites that you use each night, or you can allow your child to choose nightly.

*13. “Goodnight, Nose!”*- Bedtime rituals can also be something silly, like saying, “Goodnight, nose!” while tweaking your child’s nose, then, “Goodnight, toes!” while gently tickling her toes, and so on, saying goodnight to various parts of your child’s body.

*14. Love List*- When you tell your child goodnight, you can say, “Mommy loves you. Daddy loves you. Grandma loves you,” going through a list of the many people who love and accept your child.

Dinnertime rituals are very powerful. [Shared family dinners](https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/01/12/the-most-important-thing-you-can-do-with-your-kids-eat-dinner-with-them/?utm_term=.690a793f66a0) are associated with academic achievement, improved moods, and lower rates of depression and [anxiety](https://biglifejournal.com/blogs/blog/help-children-overcome-social-anxiety-failure). They’ve also been shown to decrease the likelihood of high-risk teenage behaviors like drinking, drugs, violence, and sexual activity.

*15. Sharing Time*- Take turns going around the table and share about your day each evening.

*16. Shared Tasks -* Have each family member contribute something to dinner preparation, making meal prep a shared endeavor.

*17. Take Turns*- Take turns choosing favorite meals based on a schedule, random drawings, or specific achievements.

*18*. *Theme Dinners*- Have weekly “theme” dinners, like Taco Tuesday, Pizza Fridays, Sunday Sundaes, etc. These are even more fun if you incorporate a toppings bar and let each family member personalize their tacos, pizza, or sundae.

*19. Sample New Foods*- Sample dinners from different cultures each month or try (and rate) different cheeses as appetizers. Maybe you even have a special family blessing you say each night or a dessert you make when someone in the family reaches a major goal or achieves something awesome.

It doesn’t matter how complicated or simple your rituals are - the point is that they make dinner a memorable and meaningful time for your family to connect.

Rituals That Develop a Sense of Belonging

The best rituals also give children a sense of [belonging and acceptance](https://biglifejournal.com/blogs/blog/activity-sense-belonging-family-manifesto). This can be accomplished with something as simple as a special greeting or farewell.

*20. Special Greetings/Farewells*- For instance, say, “See you later, alligator!” while your child responds, “After a while, crocodile!” Alternatively, you say goodbye to your child with a “kissing hand,” as in the popular children’s story [*A Kissing Hand for Chester Raccoon*](https://www.amazon.com/Kissing-Hand-Chester-Raccoon/dp/1933718773/ref=pd_lpo_sbs_14_img_0?_encoding=UTF8&psc=1&refRID=H41XE4NG2F1KZJNHX10T).

*21. Special Handshakes -* Have a personalized handshake with each of your children, making them feel unique and special.

Even these brief rituals demonstrate that your child is a cherished part of something special: your family.

Holiday rituals and unique family events also send the message that your family is a unit and that your child is an accepted and important member of this unit.

If your family celebrates Christmas, try the following:

*22.*.Home made gifts -Have a craft or cooking day and make some homemade goodies for friends, teachers, family or neighbours.

*23. Christmas Lights*- Drive around the neighborhood marveling over the Christmas lights, then vote on the best decorated houses.

*24. Decorating the Tree*- Decorate the tree while listening to carols, then eat bowls of icecream.

*25*. *Ornament Traditions*- Each year you can make ornaments with your children, or you buy a special ornament symbolizing something that happened that year.

*26. Reindeer Food*- You can leave cookies out for Santa *and* celery and carrots for the reindeer too.

If you celebrate other special celebrations consider the following ideas:

*27. Personalized food -* Make customized food with ingredients that your children select.

*28.*-Treasure hunts Play with jelly beans or other candies, making it more personalized and exciting for your children.

*29. Songs*- Sing songs, particularly any family favorites or songs that hold significance to you and your family.

*30. Act*- Act out stories from your culture or family, complete with fake props.

New Years is a great time for reflection on the year, and these rituals can help you take a look back:

*31. Family Videos*- Watch family videos or a slideshow of pictures to reflect on the year, laughing and discussing your best family moments.

*32. Show*[*Gratitude*](https://biglifejournal.com/blogs/blog/raise-grateful-kids)- Keep a “Gratitude Jar” throughout the year. Any time you’re especially grateful for something, write it on a slip of paper and put it in the jar. You can then review the slips of paper at the end of the year, creating a warm and positive transition into the new year.

*33.*Birthday Songs - A birthday ritual can be as simple as a special birthday song that you sing.

*34. Personalized Cake -*Make a special cake for each family member’s birthday (their favorite kind, of course).

*35. “Anything Goes” Breakfast -* Or perhaps on birthdays, your kids can eat anything they want for breakfast, even cupcakes or ice cream!

*36. Invent Family Holidays*- In my family growing up, we had Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, and “Kid’s Day,” an invention of my dad’s. He would give us cards and take us to do something special. Usually, this culminated in a trip to the Dairy Queen, then eating the blizzards in a fort in our backyard.

Unique family events, like the following, promote a sense of belonging as well.

*37. Weekly/Monthly Theme Nights -* You might want to try introducing a theme night that your family does weekly or monthly, like Board Game Nights or Movie Nights..

Set up specific rituals related to these nights. For instance, a different family member chooses the game or movie each time. Perhaps Movie Night is always accompanied by popcorn, and Board Game Night typically means pizza. Maybe the whole family wears pajamas and drinks hot chocolate.

*38. Sunday Morning Pancake Breakfasts -*If every Sunday seems like too much, have a special pancake breakfast the first Sunday of every month.

*39. Monthly Nature Walks –*Use bird books to make your nature walks even more fun.

*40. Favorite Restaurants -* For instance, eat pizza at the same local restaurant after every soccer game.

*41. Living Room “Camp-Outs” -*“Camp out” in the living room monthly or every so often. You can build a tent, make [microwave s’mores](https://www.tablespoon.com/recipes/microwave-smores/328631ef-4d8c-4624-ba5a-b0d97d414d03), tell stories, use flashlights to create shadow puppets, and so on.

Remember that creating a real ritual means sticking with it. So think of something that every family member would enjoy - and that won’t be much of a hassle to consistently carry out.

*Adapted from The Big Journal.*