



LOVE notes

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Routines and Rituals Strengthen Families

Why Are Family Mealtimes Important?

- Children who eat dinner with their families are 20 percent less likely to drink, smoke, or use illegal drugs.
- Teens who eat dinner with their families are less likely than other teens to have sex at young ages, get into fights or be suspended from school, and they are at lower risk for suicide.
- Dining together offers a great chance to talk with your children as well as model good eating habits.

Rituals

Unlike routines, family rituals are symbolic and convey a sense of "this is who we are" for family. Rituals often are handed down across generations. There is an "emotional imprint" connected to family rituals that people remember and replay to recapture some of the positive experience.

Rituals Provide Invaluable Memories

Familiar family rituals include birthdays, family gatherings like reunions and vacations, "Sunday dinner", and holiday celebrations. These important events offer continuity and meaning for everyone. Going to Grandma's house every Sunday for chicken dinner, having your favorite dinner and a cake on your birthday, making spe-

Sources:

Loren Marks. (April 3, 2008). EurekaAlert. In LSU Spotlights Strong African American Marriages. Retrieved March 9, 2010, from http://www.eurekaalert.org/pub_releases/2008-04/lss-lss040308.php#.

cial holiday foods, going to the same place every year for vacation are examples of rituals that become some of the necessary glue that helps hold families together.

Family routines and rituals are important to your family's health and well-being. In an era when time and energy are at a premium for most families, it's tempting to try to save time by eliminating activities that at first glance seem unnecessary and a waste of time. Think again.

Powerful Organizers of Family Life

Psychologist Barbara Fiese, Ph.D. and her colleagues at Syracuse University undertook a research project where they examined family routines and rituals over the past fifty years. Their findings revealed that routines and rituals are powerful organizers of family life and offer stability during times of stress and transition. They were able to link family routines and rituals with marital satisfaction, adolescents' sense of personal identity, children's health, academic achievement and stronger family relationships.

Routines

Routines typically revolve around getting things done within the family. Once completed, there is little thought about them until the next time. Common family routines include mealtime, bedtime, and chores.

Bedtime Routine Pays off Big Time

Especially with preschoolers, predictable routines result in healthier children whose behavior is better regulated. Children with regular bedtime routines get to sleep sooner and wake up less frequently during the night than those with no routine. Fiese's research goes on to suggest that regular routines in the household also result in improved overall health for children.

Family Dinners Matter

Sitting down to a meal together at least three times a week has big rewards for families. The Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in the Family Guide to Keeping Youth Mentally Healthy & Drug Free offers the following reasons to support family mealtimes.

try this...

1. Make a list of family rituals that are meaningful to you and plan how to incorporate at least one into your family.
2. Start a new ritual that may be passed on to future generations.
3. Plan and follow a bedtime routine for your children that works for everyone.

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