

Family Rituals

Does your family get together regularly for meaningful events or gatherings that family members would like to carry on in the future? If so, those activities are family rituals.

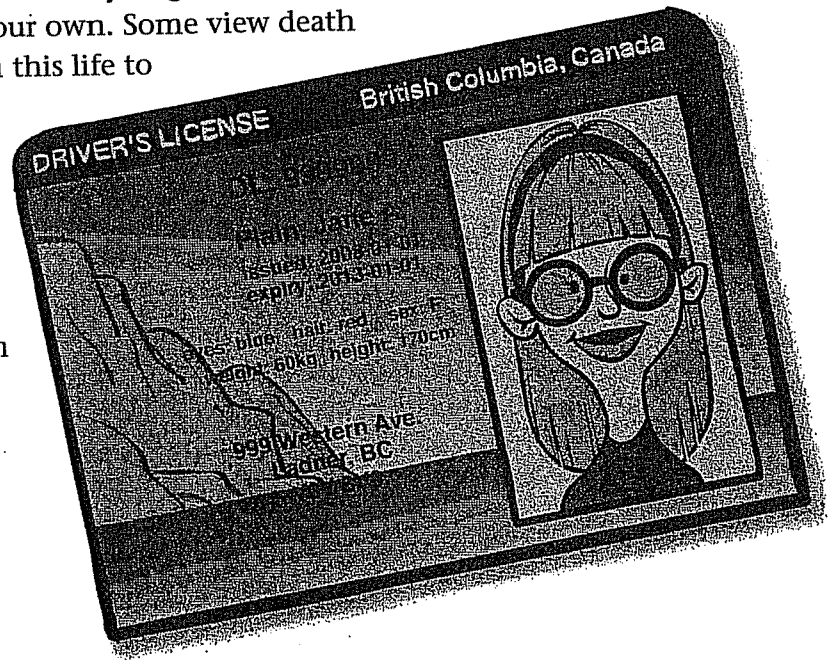
A **ritual** can be defined as a custom or behaviour regularly performed in a certain manner. Rituals reflect family **traditions** and are most often connected to cultural, religious and ethnic customs. Rituals are universal to family life regardless of the family's cultural, religious, ethnic, or socioeconomic background. Rituals can be as elaborate as celebrating births and weddings, or as simple as sharing family dinners and reading bedtime stories. All families participate in rituals although the extent of a celebration varies from family to family.

There are three main types of family rituals:

- rites of passage
- family traditions
- family routines

Rites of Passage

Rites of passage mark a time when a person reaches a new and significant change in his or her life. **Rites of passage** are about transition and transformation from one stage of life to another. Obtaining a driver's license is a rite of passage for many North American youth and is a step toward independence. Leaving home is a transition into adulthood and a time for taking on new responsibilities. When you get married, you leave your family of origin to start a family of your own. Some view death as a passage or transition from this life to an afterlife. Recognizing or celebrating rites of passage often help people understand their new roles in society. Most cultures celebrate the transition into new stages of life in their own unique ways.



Rites of passage rituals include:

Birth:

- baby showers
- naming ceremonies—
First Nations, Chinese
- Christian baptism
- circumcision
- Sal-Girah—Islam

Initiation rites (adolescence):

- Jewish—bar / bat mitzvah
- Sikh—Amrit ceremony
- Chinese—Guan Li for men and
Ji Li for women
- Islam—Shadada

Leaving the family of origin:

- engagement
- stag party / bridal shower
- travelling
- going away to school or to a
job

Marriage:

- wedding ceremony

Eldership:

- celebrating knowledge and
wisdom of elders

Death:

- grieving
- funeral rites
- wake





Consider This...

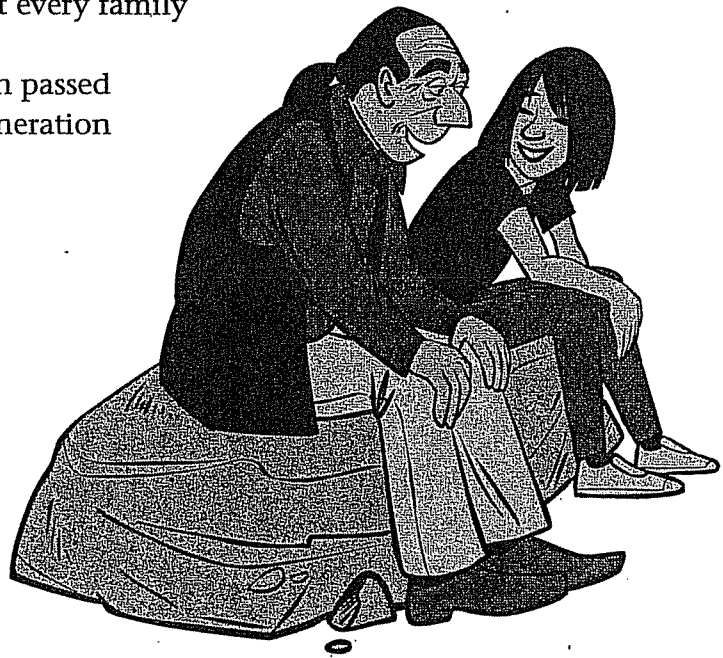
My bar mitzvah was quite a special time for me both spiritually and materially! It is a rite of passage for every Jewish boy to celebrate a milestone in his young life. I could not put into words how exciting a time it was for my family and me. Being called up to read from the Jewish scriptures for the first time in front of my whole family and all my friends could not be more rewarding. It was an immense source of pride for my parents and especially my grandparents. This was a time of huge celebration for me, and is for most Jewish families. It is quite an honor to read from the Torah, but at the same time to be showered with multitudes of gifts. What a thrill for me, and I am sure endless other thirteen-year-old Jewish kids throughout history. As I look back at this event in my life, be it through pictures or memory, the most important aspect of it was experiencing the happiness and pride bestowed upon me by my family. These memories of my loved ones on such a joyous occasion can never be erased.

Family Traditions

Family **traditions** are less about culture and religion because they are unique to individual families. Traditions are inherited or established customs, beliefs, or behaviours passed down from one generation to the next. Each family determines how their own traditions are celebrated. Effective traditions promote a sense of identity and a feeling of belonging. Having regular and predictable events or celebrations also promotes a feeling of safety and security within the family. Events could include family vacations, visits with **extended family** members, family reunions, anniversaries, birthdays, and graduations. By following traditions, family members make a statement about who they are, what they believe in, and what is important to them. Busy, hectic lifestyles can weaken family bonds; maintaining traditions and **rituals** can help keep families connected.

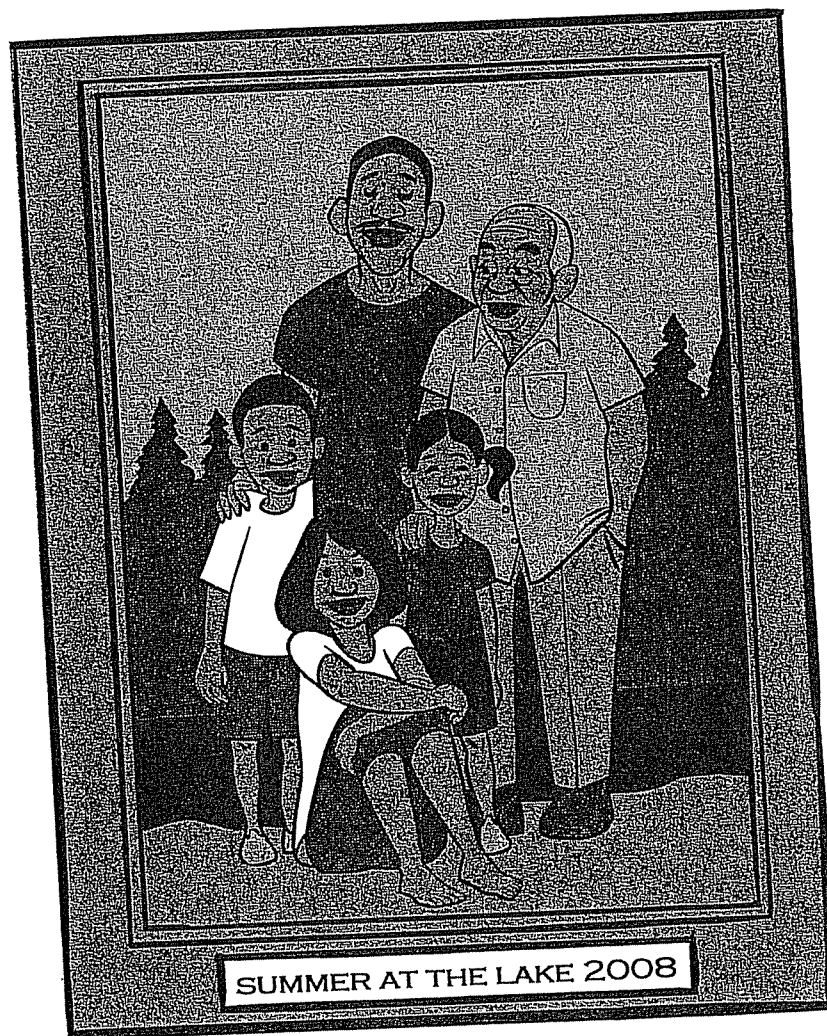
Here are some other examples of family traditions:

- special celebrations for the first day of school
- a teenager's new driver's license
- family night (sports, board games, movie)
- a 3-way 'call' over the internet
- making an annual photo album or digital slide show of family traditions and celebrations
- Sunday dinners with extended family
- work at a soup kitchen or homeless shelter once a month as a family
- an annual family photograph
- keeping a family journal that every family member writes in
- a recipe for a special occasion passed down from generation to generation



Consider This...

Houseboating on Shuswap Lake has been a long-standing tradition in my family. My extended family is disbursed throughout Western Canada, and it's a rare occasion that we can all be together as a family, particularly as the family members grow through new marriages and children. Every two years, we rent two houseboats large enough to accommodate up to forty family members. Groups of family members make the trek to the Shuswap with coolers of food and tons of family stories and anecdotes in tow. The three-day weekend on the lake provides an amazing opportunity for family members to catch up, bond, and form new memories.



Family Routines

A researcher studying families asked children what they would remember most from their childhoods. The answers were surprising. It wasn't the big gifts, the Hawaiian vacations, or the fancy celebrations that they would remember, but the simple family **routines** and **rituals** such as bedtime stories and family meals. These routines are the threads of life that bind a family together.

Routines are familiar set patterns or habits. A study on families published in the *Journal of Family Psychology* found that family routines and rituals offer stability during stressful times. It also found that family routines contribute to marital satisfaction, adolescent personal identity, child health, and stronger family relationships. In particular, the study found that children with regular bedtime routines had fewer infections and improved overall health than children with less regular bedtime routines. Also, family meals can lead to better communication among family members, which promotes better parenting.

Examples of family routines are:

- reading nightly bedtime stories
- regular bedtime
- meal preparation
- creating a family message board
- chores
- sharing meal times



Consider This...

Teenagers who eat with their family at least five times a week are more likely to get better marks at school and are less likely to have substance abuse problems.

A 2005 Columbia University Survey on The Importance of Family Dinners found that family mealtime might be more important than most parents think. Frequent family dinners resulted in better performance at school for teens; 40 percent were more likely to get A's and B's. And a Harvard University study found that family dinners were one of the most important family events in helping children develop language skills.

The study also found that teens who eat with their families five or more times a week were 42 percent less likely to drink alcohol, 59 percent less likely to smoke cigarettes, and 66 percent less likely to try marijuana.

Experts on the family suggest that awareness of the importance of **routines and rituals** may help your family's health. Here are some suggestions:

- Eat at least two to three family meals together each week.
- Enforce bedtimes, especially for young children.
- Give children a weekly allowance that represents their portion of the family income.
- Assign children chores that represent their portion of the family labour.

Important events and transitions take place within families. Rituals help families deal with stress and loss and promote health and healing. Family **rituals, traditions and routines** are unique to each family and strengthen the family by providing understanding, continuity, security, and closeness.

