



## Family Rituals

One friend, when thinking back on her childhood, remembers singing songs from the musical "Annie" with her family on holidays. She smiles as she says that hers was the corniest family in the neighborhood. Another friend remembers the special way her mother said goodnight each evening, with the same phrase that became almost a mantra. And I love how my parents walk me to my car when I leave. We wave and blow kisses as I drive off. Last year when my mom was ill and couldn't leave her bed, I realized how hugely significant that walk from the door to my car is to me. These rituals are the stuff of life. They are our warm memories -- the connections that keep families glued together. In today's fast-paced world, rituals are critical.

Dr. Becky Bailey, author of Conscious Discipline, points out that rituals are not routines. Routines provide regularity and predictability. Rituals supply connections. Rituals also impart safety and calm, two ingredients necessary for learning. When we create rituals in our families and classrooms, children belong. Routines provide structure and rituals provide nurture. Both are necessary.

Rituals are the activities that children can expect when certain things happen. When mom or dad goes on a business trip, there can be a goodbye ritual and a welcome home ritual. When a family member or classmate is absent from a gathering, there can be a ritual to recognize their absence. Morning rituals can unite us and create the tone of our day. Bedtime rituals sooth us into sleep.

One of my favorite of Dr. Bailey's rituals is the "Helpfulness Tree." Throughout the day, children can add hearts to the branches of a felt tree hanging on the wall each time a classmate does a helpful act. This causes a shift in focus to helpfulness, team, and belonging. At the end of the day, the entire class notices the hearts as a part of a goodbye ritual. We can add this ritual to our families so that we focus on what we want -- being helpful to the people we love.

Your children can help create goodbye rituals for school drop off. It can be a pinky hug, blowing kisses, special words, or a high five. The ritual can change weekly. You can also create hello rituals for picking them up. Keep eye contact and touch a part of all rituals.

Sanctification, the third of three concepts for living brought forward by Wendy Mogel in her book The Blessing of a Skinned Knee, is "the process of acknowledging the holiness in everyday actions and events." It is this level of presence that adds to the value of

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rituals. And, in turn, rituals sanctify our lives. Our homes become sacred places for us. Our dinner tables become places for gratitude. Our teaching moments with our children become times of safety.

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