

# Forming New Family Traditions

## The Importance of Traditions

by Kathleen Spring

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Whether you are a family, a couple or an individual, having family traditions are important to your health and provide a certain feeling of security. And, they can be great fun, too!

There is a well-known much-loved movie and play called “Fiddler on the Roof.” It is the story of hard-working but poor family man Tevye who is trying to hold on to his religion, his traditions and his five daughters, but finds it is a struggle because life is “as shaky as a fiddler on the roof.” He feels traditions are the glue that keeps them stable. Starting a new tradition may be difficult, but the long-term benefits are priceless.

Through thick and thin, a person can hold on to their traditions and feel that, at least for a moment, things are normal and good. A homeless person might find saying “Grace” over a meager meal gives them some sweet remembrance of home. A soldier in a war zone may find reciting “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star” gives him hope and wraps him in memories of his little girl back home who he recited it to whenever they saw a bright star.

In starting a new tradition, family members need to feel like they have input and/or a good reason to want to do it. The extent of time spent on planning and discussions will be balanced by the appeal factor of the tradition. If you say to kids, let’s make cookies every Christmas, there will probably be no complaint. But if you say, let’s all go see the Nutcracker Suite, there might be some disagreement.

It has been long recommended by professionals that the best way to help children become strong decision-making adults is for the parent to set an example by being a strong person and making decisions and setting rules, but to give their children choices within that framework. A parent will purchase a young child’s school wardrobe, but they can lay out three outfits for them to choose from to wear that day. This process works for starting a new tradition.

A parent might feel it is important that the family start the tradition of eating supper together every night. They should prepare themselves by writing down some pros and cons about the idea. They can explain to their spouse and the children why they feel strongly about it, as well as the benefits, and then ask them to help set up a schedule to make it happen. Usually the parent is just as much to blame for the kids being out every night at classes or sports, and so they can show their children that they too will be making changes in order to help set the new tradition. The family can negotiate together which classes, sports or social activities can be dropped or times changed.

Many times it is not initially evident as to what effect the new tradition will have on the family. It may take years to fully find out. My step-son never had the tradition of the family eating supper together before he moved into my house, and now, years later, he says that it was one of the best things that ever happened in his teen family life.

In the case of couples without children, there is always one person who is in charge of making family decisions happen. If there is no leader, then a lot of time will be wasted, and it may never happen. Let us say that it is the wife. Maybe the new tradition is buying a book for each other every Christmas. She can take his or her idea, figure out the benefits, collect comments, and make it happen. Without allowing for input, the other person may feel like it is being forced upon them, and both parties will suffer.

Single people can and should develop their own traditions, or even an individual who is married and/or has a family can create individual personal new traditions. One year I decided I wanted to make something special at Christmas time that would be my own unique tradition. I made a banner to put over the fireplace. It was quilted with words and designs on it that symbolized joy, hope and peace. After a few years, I decided not to put it up because I thought people were tired of it. Instead, my son said, "It's not Christmas if you don't put that banner up."

Some of these new traditions may come from a person's childhood family traditions, like going to an amusement park every 4th of July. Or, it could come from a religious upbringing, like baptizing a baby. It might be work related, like all the employees and their families working at a soup kitchen one day a year.

The younger the family or marriage is, the easier it will be to get others to join in. Do not wait to bring traditions that bring joy, hope, love and security to your family.

In the story of "Fiddler on the Roof," Tevye's family is being ousted from his small Russian village, but they find comfort in no one being able to take away their traditions. "You might say every one of us is a fiddler on the roof... Why do we stay up there if it's so dangerous? ...That I can tell you in one word, tradition! ...Because of our traditions we've kept our balance for many many years ...And because of our traditions, every one of us knows who he is..."