



# Fact Sheet

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## The Times We Treasure

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When asked to describe a special family memory, individuals often recall specific events or activities in which their family accomplished something. Many treasured memories center around family rituals. Rituals help us to identify who we are both as an individual and as a family; they provide something constant, stable, and secure in a confusing world; they help us to make life cycle transitions; they help us come together during times of crisis. Rituals also help to create an awareness of our connection with those who went before and those who will follow after us.

Families use different types of rituals as they move from one state of development to the next. Many families journey through each of the six stages outlined in this fact sheet, along with the corresponding rituals.

Rituals can be divided into five clusters—down-to-earth, seasonal, hackneyed, courting, and leisure. Down-to-earth rituals are at-home, inexpensive maintenance activities. Seasonal rituals center around yearly celebrations and activities, such as birthday celebrations, holiday festivities, and vacations. Hackneyed rituals reflect the easiest way to get through obligatory interactions. Courting rituals represent intimate activities between the couple, such as hugging, holding hands, and doing special things for each other. Leisure rituals include relaxing activities, such as attending concerts, plays, games, and other events together.

### Stage 1: Leaving Home (Single Young Adults)

Because the young adult is required to separate from his or her family of origin at this time, it is common for them to avoid family rituals or to unwillingly submit to involve-

ment. Examples of rituals that would help to ease the transition from dependent child to independent adult include: assigning chores that the adolescent will soon have to do by himself or herself like: balancing the check-book, meal planning, grocery shopping, or doing laundry; presenting the teen with a “care package” full of personal items, rolls of change, snacks, stationery, postage stamps, and so forth as he or she leaves home; and giving him or her a quilt made from scraps of fabric from his or her school clothes.

### Stage 2: Marriage (The New Couple)

This stage represents the joining of two separate family ritual systems, which usually produces a new, third system. Three researchers, Linda Berg-Cross, Christine Daniels, and Peggy Carr found four major results when they examined the connection between marital rituals (activities ordinarily done together by the couple in a routine way) and the success or failure of a marriage. They were: (1) taking part in ritualized activities is identified with long-term marital success; (2) low ritual activity foreshadowed marital dissolution; (3) older married women considered rituals that they participated in most important while, (4) older divorced women showed a strong regret because they rated rituals that they did not do as most important.

### Stage 3: Families with Young Children

With the first baby comes the development of child care rituals. These rituals tend to recur with the birth of each child, and therefore, become the way to act when a baby arrives. Young children thrive on rituals; in fact, they need

them for security. Parents use them to provide order and routine during one of the busiest times in their lives. Examples of common rituals during this stage are: bedtime and bathing routines, reading stories, attending extended family celebrations, and sharing hopes and goals for the future.

#### Stage 4: Families with Adolescents

Rituals or rites of passage help establish expectations for adolescents as they move from childhood to adulthood. Common adolescent rites of passage include: getting a driver's license, dating, purchasing a class ring, and becoming old enough to vote. This is the time when boundaries need to be flexible enough to allow the adolescent to explore and experiment with new roles and relationships, yet stable enough to permit him or her to become dependent when he or she cannot cope with the new and changing demands.

#### Stage 5: Launching Children and Moving On

Women often devote more of their energies to a career at this time. E. Goffman believes that access, maintenance, and ratificatory rituals may help dual-career couples stay connected. Access rituals are behavioral signs of affection when reconnecting with each other. They can include: kissing, hugging, "hello's," hand-shaking, and so forth. Tension and exhaustion are likely to cause hostile exchanges during reconnection. Access rituals help spouses know how the other is feeling and provide a transition time to let go of negative experiences and feelings from work and reconnect with positive feelings for loved ones. Maintenance rituals involve planning and prioritizing time to be alone together. They invigorate the marriage

relationship. Ratificatory rituals provide a way to celebrate both partners' efforts and acknowledge the help of each partner in the attainment of a goal and also emphasize their connection to each other. A special evening out to celebrate a promotion at work is an example of a ratificatory ritual.

#### Stage 6: Families in Later Life

Contact with extended family members is very important during these years. Family traditions that provide a way of reviewing the family's history help to fulfill the older generation's need to survive while accepting their mortality. Telling stories based on family events such as: births or deaths, exciting or difficult times, or funny things that have happened helps to build a bridge between generations. Symbols of important ritual events abound in homes of elderly family members. On mantels, desks, dressers and refrigerators are photographs, items grandchildren have made, bronzed baby shoes, dried flowers, and other sentimental keepsakes. These are ritual symbols of the times we treasure.

#### References

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