



# Chinook

Extension Family Life Newsletter  
University of Wyoming

May-June 1994

Ben Silliman, Family Life Specialist, Editor

## GET WITH THE SYSTEM

*The cardboard family  
Is not the ideal;  
Neat smiles and clean shoes  
Are just part of what's real.  
What's inside not outside is the clue:  
How we manage stress;  
How I treat you.*

This edition of Chinook focuses on family process: patterns and styles by which family members interact with each other and their surrounding environment. Focus on processes: interaction, development, adaptation, has revolutionized thinking about families and other groups over the past generation. While family structure (members and their roles) is not unimportant (i.e., two functional parents who get along have many advantages over a single parent at any level of functioning), family process helps us understand why a capable single parent provides a more positive place to grow up than conflict-ridden, "emotionally absent" parents who never bothered to get a divorce. In agribusiness we know this truth: Management (people and problem-solving) skills, not size, type of operation, or location is the key to success.

***"We have concluded that family rituals are vital to the life of a healthy family."***

--Steven Wolin & Linda Bennett

Process thinking also involves seeing families as whole units, systems. Watch an anthill some time: Each ant's actions make sense in light of the colony's needs (i.e., why not eat a crumb when you find it?); the colony can do things one ant couldn't do (i.e., remove your picnic lunch); each ant depends on every other; each colony has its own unique pattern for reaching the same goal: survival.

One expression of family process receiving much attention in the past decade is family ritual. Family therapists/researchers Steven Wolin and Linda Bennett have pointed to rituals, repeated patterns of behavior rich in symbols, which create and reinforce family identity by: 1) clarifying roles; 2) delineating boundaries in and out of the family; and 3) defining family rules. These scholars found that not only can family rituals (see p. 4) enrich intimacy, adaptation, communication in competent families, but "...those families evidencing less transmission of alcoholism to the next generation were the ones that had successfully prevented the destruction of their rituals during the period of heaviest parental alcoholism." Understanding rituals (traditions, celebrations, and unique habit) in family, school, work or community life helps us appreciate people and help them create patterns which affirm and account, liberate and bond, lighten and deepen the human experience.

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Jim DeBree, Director, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Wyoming, Laramie.

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12 PARADOXES:

"Cycles that free, frustrate, and leave you flat"

Wyoming Extension Family Life

FAMILY SPC. CALENDAR

- May 11 Casper
May 16-18 SUMMIT
May 20-22 West. Region. Research Youth/Resiliency Project, Seattle
June 7 Jr. Leadership Days/4-H
June 8 FCE Leadership/Douglas
June 13-14 Cody, Powell

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Extension SUMMIT on "Strengthening Families and Communities" will be held in Laramie, May 16 (1:30 PM) to May 18 (1:30 PM). If you are interested, please contact Ben or Deb Johnson, 235-9400.

"Balancing Work and Family" is the focus of a Utah State Satellite video on May 25. Downlink coordinates were announced or can be obtained from Randy Anderson.

A coalition of family-oriented organizations, including UW-CES, will sponsor a conference for parents on "The Fabric of Family Empowerment" in Casper, August 26-27. If parents in your county can attend, (on own or via your \$100 sponsorship), call 638-4000 for info and registration.

"There is never a wrong time to do the right thing."

--Jackson Brown, Sr.

Newsletter

HUMAN CHECKERS: A SILENCE TOO DEEP FOR WORDS

If you can't get rid of the family skeleton, you may as well make him dance. --George Bernard Shaw

Communications expert Sherrod Miller offers an interesting strategy from his therapy practice which may be useful to our work on communication. He tells how often husbands and wives, fathers and sons ended up shouting at one another in an attempt to be understood. Since their most intense words had to do with relationship issues, he asked them to "dance" their distance and closeness, pretending they were on a checkerboard. Starting with an agreed-on time and place, partners took turns (without speaking) stepping from square-to-square in response to each other. Their posture and

HUM.DEV./FAMILY NEWS

Recent Census Bureau projections expect Wyoming population growth to increase nearly 40% by 2020. While that ratio is among the highest, the state's relatively small 1990 population makes projections much less dramatic than California's 51% projected growth.--USA Today, 4/22/94.

A USA Today/CNN/Gallup Poll found 65-72% of Americans in favor of at least temporarily removing a child from a home which:

- \*was filthy or lacking food
\*lacked adult supervision
\*used repeated slapping, spanking or bruising children
\*had alcohol or drug-abusing parents
--USA Today, 4/8/94, p. A1.

closeness. At some point in turn-taking, partners would come face-to-face or agree to accept the distance (or disagreement) between them. That point of understanding held the potential for real acceptance and dialogue.

Another of Miller's useful ideas is his list of principles for "Changing the Way You Relate":

- 1. It only takes one person to change a system--you or me--by changing the next step.
2. If it only takes one person to change a relationship pattern, then that person is me.
3. If what I am doing is not working, then I should stop doing it and start doing something else.
4. Nothing works all the time.

Source: Sherrod Miller, Daniel Wackman, Elam Nunnally, and Phyllis Miller. (1988). Connecting with Self and Others Interpersonal Communication Programs, Inc., 7201 S. Broadway, Littleton, CO 80122 -(303-794-1764)

A State University of New York study suggests that college students with "Type-A behavior" (anxious, driven) are more likely to have "Type-A" parents. While not ruling out genetic sources, the study points to critical punishing parenting as a source.--USA Today, 4/22/94, p. 5D.

A British study found new evidence of a link between high concentrations of aluminum in the brain and changes associated with Alzheimer's disease. Post-mortem examinations of patients who had taken high-aluminum medications (antacids, buffered aspirin, etc.) were used. Other influences were not ruled out.--USA Today, 4/22/94, p. 5D.

## FACTS AND STATS: Family Times Together

Thousands of Americans participate in sporting activities each weekend. Non-competitive recreation is one of the most effective patterns families can do together.

Frequency (1,000s)	USA	WY	WY Rank (by %)
Aerobics	24,180.0	54.0	6
Baseball	15,491.0	13.0	45
Bicycle riding	5,609.3	17.3	3
Boats	43.7	50.6	23
Bowling	40,463.0	53.0	42
Camping	46,345.0	97.0	19
Golf	23,058.0	66.0	6
Health Clubs	20,299.0	63.0	2
Hunting	18,114.0	44.0	21
Running/Jogging	24,310.0	88.0	2
Softball	21,084.0	38.0	24
Swimming	68,979.0	84.0	47
Tennis	18,622.0	9.0	46
Walking	68,995.0	169.0	7

Source: Congressional Quarterly for States.

A 1990 study on leisure indicated the following participation by gender (average participation over a 5 year period)

Activity	Average Number of Occasions % Participating	Men		Women	
		Men	Women	Men	Women
Gardening/yard work	26	1.30	0.94		
Exercise	18	1.52	1.37		
Biking	11	0.59	0.52		
Weight lifting/training	9	0.84	0.21		
Joggin/Running	8	0.65	0.29		
Swimming	8	0.35	0.30		
Dancing	8	0.21	0.30		
Aerobics	7	0.14	0.54		
Basketball	5	0.30	0.04		
Golf	4	0.21	0.04		

Source: Robinson, John P. & Goodbey, Geoffrey (1994). Sports, fitness, and gender gap. *Leisure Sciences*, 15, pp.291-307.

**"The display of status symbols is usually a result of low self-esteem. The self-confident person can afford to project a modest image."**

--Jackson Brown, Sr.

## Vacation Observations

Family Vacations are another place where families spend time together. For working parents, this vacation time is "quality time" with the kids and family. Families plan the whole year for the two weeks they are on their own to do what they want to do as a family.

### Plan ahead

- think about the kind of weather
- how much money will it cost
- will you drive or fly
- will you camp or stay in hotels

### Keep the children in mind

- places they would enjoy

### Find a place or activities for everyone

- do things everyone will enjoy
- go where you can relax

Sources: Karen Levine. (Jul.'88). The family vacation. *Parents*, pp. 56-59 and Katherine Rodeghier. (Apr.'92). Family travel. *Parents*, pp.146-149.

## Unhappy Rituals: Patterns of Dysfunctional Communication

1. **Constant Message:** Endless repetition in an attempt to get the same message(s) across, usually having the opposite effect (i.e., repetition ignored). The "broken record technique" recommended by *Assertive Discipline* as a key parenting tool borders on this pattern.
2. **Self-Cancelling Message:** Contradictory or invalidating messages (explicit or implicit) like: "You really ought to do this...but I'll take care of it" or "Of course, I really don't know anything about this." confuse and frustrate listeners.
3. **Tangential Communication:** Words and behaviors which seem like nonsense; continuing irrelevant or distracting comments characterize attempts "not to communicate."
4. **Hyperbolic Communication:** Exaggerated statements can be used to cancel the literal interpretation: "Everything has gone wrong" or "Everything is my fault."
5. **Echoing:** Consistent, reliable repetition of a person's message without reaction may be saying "I am scared," "I have no opinions of my own," or "You are the only one who counts."
6. **Symptomatic Communication:** Apparent physical, emotional, or mental disability can substitute for honest sharing of real ideas/feelings, be used to manipulate, or and lead listeners to discount it: "Don't mind her, she's crazy."
7. **Literal-figurative Crossing of Incoming Messages:** Taking literally messages intended as figurative (i.e., "This is killing me" or "He was so mad, steam came out of his ears." For a great example, watch "Being There" on video).
8. **Imperviousness to Incoming Messages:** Ignoring input to avoid having to listen to/change with another's requests, but resulting in being ignored or discounted more often.

Source: Larry Constantine. (1992). *Family Paradigms*. New York: Guilford, p. 78-79.

## **More Than "Going Through the Motions": THE POTENTIAL OF RITUALS FOR BUILDING FAMILY VALUES**

Life has a way of shaping its patterns around families. Young parents are rudely reminded of this when the firstborn squawks through their "going out for ice cream" routine. Families working shifts, raising special needs children, or caring for frail parents are sharply aware of limits put on rituals. Yet re-creating healthy rituals within these limits is the key to coping. Understanding and using ritual to organize life and teach values can help families regain creative control of their lives.

**Family ritual** is "a symbolic form of communication that, owing to the satisfaction that family members experience through its repetition, acted out systematically over time."

Rituals reinforce family identity and give all members a shared and necessary sense of belonging.

Both the need and meaning for particular kinds of rituals varies across the life cycle. (i.e., "tucking into bed")

Rituals are primary mechanisms for conservation of the family paradigm, or way of interacting with the outside world (i.e., maintaining Friday as a "family night" insulates kids from social gatherings with peers) (Reiss, 1981)

Samples of family rituals include:

- 1) **Consecration**: reinforcing of family heritage (reunions, memorials, telling family stories, ethnic celebrations)
- 2) **Degradation**: reducing influence of the past (visiting new vacation spots, allowing for new member roles, talking out rather than holding grudges)
- 3) **Punctuality**: captures and continues a family's level of integration (practice of conflict resolution, facilitating of new development opportunities)

Research by David Reiss, M.D., and his colleagues at George Washington University found (in structured interviews) that "extreme ritual disruption was significantly related to greater intergenerational recurrence of alcoholism, whereas ritual protection (holding on to vacations, mealtimes, holiday celebrations, etc.) was associated with less transmission."

Family rituals connect members to their culture and to generations past and future (remembering summer picnics past, fantasizing your own wedding, personalities around the Thanksgiving Day dinner table)

Families often describe their qualities in terms of the rituals they maintain (i.e., closeness evident in all being at birthdays, driving/calling when someone is sick/hurt; fun-loving in the crazy gags members do when they get together)

Rituals teach crucial family rules (social customs) and myths (stories linked to family identity)

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**"My family remains my schoolhouse. From those people I learned to love music, fight to the underdog, save my money, treasure autumn walks, and tickle unmercifully. I also learned how to love and how to fight. Sometimes I learned by good**

Rituals are often described in three categories:

- 1) **Family celebrations**: holidays and occasions widely practiced in the culture and special in the minds of family
  - Rites of Passage**: weddings, funerals, baptisms, bar mitzpahs marking membership and development
  - Annual Religious Celebrations**: Christmas, Easter, Passover Seder
  - Annual Secular Holidays**: Thanksgiving, New Year's, Independence Day
 --> Celebrations usually standardized across families, practices specific to subcultures, symbols universal  
 --> Bonds, hurts, fulfilled and broken expectations increase intensity of emotional experiences around celebrations  
 --> Gathering with family friends expands group identity, defining both its uniqueness and union with the culture
- 2) **Family Traditions**: less culture-specific, more idiosyncratic practices in families (i.e., vacations, visits with extended family, birthday/anniversary customs, parties with special food, music). Cards or decor may be cultural contributions, but families "choose/make their own."
  - > Some families' traditions are more child-centered than others; some more inclusive of extended family and friends
  - > Some traditions are developed (or borrowed) to solve practical problems (i.e., use of family councils or "time out" for problem-solving or conflict reduction)
- 3) **Patterned Family Interactions** least frequent, most spontaneous (i.e., dinner and bedtime routines, treatment of guests, leisure activities, discipline of children, greetings) all of which help define a member's roles, responsibilities.
  - > Formal or informal, the key to these routines is consistency and predictability

Family rituals of all types vary greatly among families

Moore and Myerhoff (1977) note several educational and regulatory functions underlying family rituals:

- 1) **Transformation**: family preparations for the formal practice of the central ritual (i.e., preparing the house for Christmas, birthday, etc.--moving from ordinary to special)
- 2) **Communication**: events which foster communication and connection among members around sets of dramatic events (i.e., Thanksgiving dinner, recognition ceremony)
- 3) **Stabilization**: consistency and continuity of actions and meanings; an attempt to create meaning out of life

Source: Steven J. Wolin & Linda A. Bennett. (1984). Family rituals. *Family Process*, 23, 401-420. Examples added.

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**At the Movies (and Tape Deck).** *The movie version of Amy Tan's "The Joy-Luck Club" (now on video) provides graphic examples of constructive and destructive rituals, rituals in transition, and rituals (Eastern and Western) in collision. The 1989 song, "The Living Years," by Mike and the Mechanics provides a sober reflection on the importance of patterned rituals for talking and affirming one another in families.*

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**examples; other times I learned what not to do. Now I carry my family with me as I live out the lessons of childhood in the process of creating my new family. At this point, I'm very grateful that I grew up in a good 'school.'**"  
 --from Galvin & Brommel (1986), p. 1.

**Out of the Rut:  
NEW AND OLD RITUALS  
ON FAMILY VACATIONS  
by Jeremiah Mark Silliman**

Rituals are things that the family does all the time. Eating popcorn every Sunday night or building snowmen together every time it snows are rituals. You do something different on vacations--you get out of normal rituals. Of course you still eat breakfast and brush your teeth at night but you don't get up and go to school. On vacation, if you're in a motel room you can get more bored than at home because there are less things to do.

On my Spring Break, we went with my dad on a trip. We went to Rock Springs, Evanston, and Pinedale. Dad worked during the day, so my mom brought some activities for us to do in the motel. In Rock Springs, we put "ocean capsules" in hot water. When they had turned into shapes of sea animals, we dipped them in paint and printed on a paper. Then we colored pictures and made up stories about ocean creatures. We visited the museum and the mall. When we went to Evanston, we colored dinosaurs and made a story. Then we went to the park and made a volcano out of playdough and used vinegar and baking soda to make it erupt. We took some more playdough and pushed plastic dinosaurs into it and made fossils. We let them dry in the back window of the car. Whenever we were on the road we played stories with our X-Men and Power Rangers and wondered if we could climb the sandy hills. In Pinedale, we got a dinosaur picture and put styrofoam pieces on it to look like bones. After that, we did tatoos, then made some necklaces with beads. That night, we put some small plastic dinosaurs called "Dinogrows" into a cup of water and overnight they grew.

The next day, Saturday, we drove to Jackson through the snow and clouds and had breakfast at Jedediah Smith's. Kids shouldn't try their sourdough pancakes, but the French Toast is delicious. We looked at shops, drove up to the mountains and sunk in snow. My dad took a picture of me under a sign that said "Moose 8," which looks like "Moose 8 Jeremiah." I hope he enjoyed his dinner. Up the road we really did see moose and I got out my binoculars. We were going to stop another night but we were getting tired of my three-year-old brother's ritual of waking us up in strange places.

A vacation gives you a break from your normal routine. Yet even time away from school is no fun if you're just bored. Fun activities and games make a new routine that's not boring. Then when your dad is done with work or Saturday comes, you feel more like having fun. After a week on the road, your own bed and normal rituals seem nice to do again.

*Jeremiah is a Fifth Grader at Spring Creek Elementary School in Laramie, smart, good looking, and not coincidentally related to Chinook's editor.*

**Back at Home: Rituals That Enrich**

**Reading Aloud**

A number of studies have pointed to the educational as well as family cohesion value of reading aloud. In addition to a wealth of worldly experience, books provide material for discussing values, expressing creativity, building shared family events, and making happy times together.

Find more information in:  
Jim Trelease. (1989). Read Aloud Handbook. NY: Penguin.  
Books for Children. (1993). \$1, Timeless Classics 50 via Consumer Info. Catalog, PO Box 100, Pueblo, CO 81002

**Celebrations**

Planning, preparing for, and enjoying special events such as Mother's Day, Memorial Day, Flag Day, Summer Solstice, Father's Day, Children's Day, Independence Day, Labor Day (plus birthdays, graduations, reunions, weddings/anniversaries) through the summer teaches about rituals and facilitates organization and creative expression skills (esp. if preparations are "home-made."

When everybody is really bored, "invent" celebrations like "washing dogs day," "backyard obstacle course," or "badminton (or croquet) tournament."

Find more information in:

Carol Beckman; Roberta Simmons; & Nancy Thomas. (1982). Early Childhood Activity Guide for Holidays and Seasons. Colorado Springs, CO: Channels to Children.  
Ann Pellowski. (1987). The Family Story-telling Handbook. New York, NY: MacMillan.

**For the Love of Science**

Lots of learning activities can get a family into nature, make fun on a rainy (windy) day, and offer quality time together. Rock collecting, tree and flower identification, experiments with household chemicals (baking soda and vinegar), watching birds, fish, or ants, and building simple machines are among them. In addition, trips to museums, hospitals, auto garages, sand pits, or refineries give science a "real world" flavor.

Find more information in:

Helping Your Child Learn Science. (1991). Free, and Stars in Your Eyes \$1.50 available through Consumer Info. Catalog.

**What's Cookin'?**

Making a special day or person responsible for dinner or cookout provides opportunity for predictability (a night to look forward to) and variety (new recipes).

For recipes on food and fun try:

Ann Cole; Carolyn Haas; Faith Bushnell; & Betty Weinberger. (1972). I Saw a Purple Cow. Boston: Little-Brown.

*Note: The Sillimans' summer nighs will include fun rituals: Mon: Art; Tue: Science; Wed: Sports; Thu: Geography. To increase your likelihood of sticking to rituals, set up a calendar and let the kids help locate/plan/screen events!*

**Using Rituals to Recreate**

Families like to share stories about their rituals and those rituals, in turn, tell much about the values and relationships in the family. Therapist Evan Imber-Black helps families create rituals which promote healing and growth. Her "homework" five functions critical to healthy family processes:

- 1) Membership: Changing or clarifying family "boundaries" through, for example, arranging for all members in a newly reconstituted family to sit down together every evening at supper rather than eating separately as each found convenient;
- 2) Healing: For example, finding an effective series of symbolic actions for mourning an unresolved loss.;
- 3) Identity: Reinforcing a challenged identity or helping make the transition to a new identity through carefully designed celebrations;
- 4) Belief Expressions and Negation: Resolving painful conflicts or ambivalences in family members' beliefs;
- 5) Celebration: Affirming family loyalty and building family morale by successfully designing and executing one of the major annual holiday celebrations or family traditional celebrations.

Source: Carlfred Broderick. (1993). Understanding Family Processes. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, p. 210-211. Based on E. Imber-Black; J. Roberts; & R. Whiting. (1988). Rituals in Families and Family Therapy. New York, NY: Norton.

**"Happiness is not the absence of problems, but the ability to deal with them."**

--Jackson Brown Sr.

**Planning Your Rituals**

Ritual: Fourth-of-July Picnic/Family Reunion

	Positive Elements	Problematic Aspects	Changes Desired
Preparation.....	lots to do	many resp.	more help
People.....	all involved	babes tired	nap time
Place.....	beautiful!	far from home	reserve
Participation.....	many there	keeping track	organize
Presents.....	none given	could add fun things	gag gifts skits

Structure: Evan Imber-Black & Janine Roberts. (1992). Rituals in Our Times. New York, NY: HarperCollins, p. 123.

Examples: Ben Silliman, Extension Family Life Specialist

**Understanding Family Rituals**

For any family ritual, members can understand, teach about, or enhance rituals by grasping their purposes:

- Relating: interacting, caring, getting "space"
- Changing adapting to development and crises
- Healing: forgiving, recovering from loss
- Believing: family values, faith, myths
- Celebrating: special events

Source: Imber-Black & Roberts, cited above, p. 300.

**Elements of Ritual:  
BUILDING BLOCKS  
FOR RECREATING FAMILIES**

Family Life Educator Jean Illsley Clarke identifies 13 elements found in rituals. Each can be considered a creative building block in developing activities which help families organize, understand, and remember events which are significant to their lives together.

1. Time--developmental steps, seasons, sequences of special moments which lead to celebration of events.
2. Place--certain geographic or household locations linked to family events or communal events shared by family.
3. Oral Element--things to eat, sounds, expressions, kisses.
4. Scent--aromas reminiscent of special celebrations.
5. Light or Darkness--time of day, illumination or cover, special media such as candles, bonfire, jack-o'-lanterns.
6. Music--instrumentation and singing designed to create a mood and recall (as other senses) past events.
7. Words--speaking and/or listening to "prescriptions" (pledges, songs, poems) or remarks created especially to celebrate the event.
8. Movement or Stillness--Arrangement of persons in a room or movements of arms, legs, or body in physical or symbolic movements (stand, sit, bow, salute, march)
9. Dress--Special clothing or decoration (black tie, bridal gown, uniform, etc.)
10. Symbols--Objects or actions which stand for something else (Christmas tree, wedding ring, flag, gavel, etc.)
11. Mutual Exchange--Pattern of give-and-take which pledge, bond, and acknowledge.
12. People and Roles--Special "parts" and "scripts" for persons involved in events (preacher at wedding, cook at barbecue, drum major in parade, etc.)
13. Structure and Flow--Sequence of opening, middle, and closing, with each having prescribed parts and style.

Source: Jean Illsley Clark. (1993). Rituals Can Enhance Our Lives. Minneapolis, MN: Family Information Services, M&M-51-52.

**Knowledge into Action**

- 1) Brainstorm how each of the above elements contributes to the practice and meaning of one or more rituals with which you are familiar (i.e., Christmas, graduation, funeral,
- 2) Use the elements above to develop a ritual for your family, class, workplace, etc. for these or other events: birth of a child, divorce, remarriage, failing a grade, unemployment/demotion, end of conflict, etc.

## **The Power of Rituals** by Curtis Hobbs

When unexpected events occur in our lives, the presence of rituals can create stability and strength to grow through these events. Unexpected events such as a teen pregnancy, a suicide, or an unexpected death, can be less traumatic with the establishment of rituals.

In the introductory chapter of their book, Rituals for our Times, Evan Imber-Black and Janine Roberts (1992) say, "Rituals surround us and offer opportunities to make meaning from the familiar and the mysterious at the same time. Built around common symbols and symbolic actions like birthday cakes and blowing out candles, or exchanging rings and wedding vows, many parts of rituals are well-known to us. This familiarity provides anchor points to help us make transitions into the unknown such as turning a year older, or becoming a married person. Rituals bestow protected time and space to stop and reflect on life's transformations."

### What are rituals?

- \* Birthday parties with birthday cakes whose candles are not blown out till a wish has been made.
- \* How a parent's departures and returns are announced to the child.
- \* Remembering the anniversary of a loved one's death can be a way of affirming their place in the family, even in their absence.
- \* Family reunions that occur every five years and at a different relative's place are family rituals.

### How families can use rituals:

- \* Creating healthy emotional ties
- \* Acknowledging membership changes
- \* Healing
- \* Defining and redefining identity
- \* Rites of passage
- \* Finding meaning and purpose
- \* Creating order and predictability

### Managing rituals wisely

- \* Moderate ritualization
- \* Distinctiveness of rituals
- \* Balance stability and change
- \* Avoiding inappropriate use of rituals

Rituals can be created by culture--handed down from generation to generation, or they can be created or invented by the family themselves for a special occasion or event. These rituals can also become a negative experience to the individual and family. At these times re-doing or creating a new ritual is helpful and necessary.

### How to change or create new rituals:

- \* Goals
  - where are you going?
  - what do you want it to accomplish?
- \* Form
  - how much time?
  - how long will it be passed on?
- \* Content: -behavior, symbolism, emotion

Source: Randal D. Day; Wesley R. Burr; Kathleen S. Bahr; & Allison L. Blakemore. (1993). Family Science. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Co.

## **"Rituals for Healing Hurts"** Reviewed by Curtis Hobbs

Three types of action that influence positive change:

- \* Increasing your awareness
  - identify how things really are in relation to how you wish they could be.
- \* Assessing your situation
  - identify your situation
  - become aware of true feelings
  - trace problem to root issues
- \* Changing your behavior
  - go slowly
  - take small steps
  - expect resistance and surprises
  - remember that change is a process, not a product

Writing things out helps to bring about positive change by:

- \* Expressing your emotions
  - discovery
  - catharsis
- \* Broadening your perspective
  - create order out of chaos
- \* Applying insight to problem-solving
  - think through goals and dreams you have
  - wide-angle vision on yourself, family, and life experiences

This process of writing uses several techniques:

- \* Unfinished sentence
- \* Lists
- \* Dialogues

\* Clustering--brainstorming about subjects related to your hurts and then condensing into a single word or event and then using this word as the center of the other related issues and feelings. Below is a sample of a cluster done by a woman who wanted to know more about how she was affected by her parent's divorce when she was nine

Many aspects of the family are incorporated in these writing exercises. Family communication, timelines of the family events through the years, identifying the family "stance", conflict, blaming, self-esteem, body image, evaluating family boundaries, hurting and healing are a few of the possibilities of family topics that can be written about when it is difficult to verbalize and identify familial hurts.

Source: Foster, Carolyn (1993). The Family Patterns Workbook. New York, NY: Putnam Publishing Group. 235 p.

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**"When an old person dies, a library is lost."**  
 --Tommy Swan  
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## **"Growing Your Own": RITUALS FOR "SPECIAL EVENTS"**

Sure, it's great to celebrate New Years...but what if you're on your own? It's fun to enjoy wedding anniversaries...but what do you do after a divorce? And what can you do when, instead of a baby shower, all you have is the memory of a miscarriage? Evan Imber-Black offers some examples (and I've added others) of rituals developed to remember and recover from life events not recognized by cultural rituals.

### **House-Cooling Party**

After a divorce, a woman asked friends to come over to her "new" home and, with a sense of humor, help her celebrate the house-cooling to replace "his and her" stuff with a single woman's stuff. This also give her a changed feeling about friendship and life alone.

### **Leaving Home**

When a mentally handicapped girl wanted to move out to a group home, her family gave her find a place, decorate it, and set up a self-reliant routine to guarantee success.

### **Grandpa's Death and Graduation**

A girl whose family celebrated big-time over high school graduations was denied her own celebration because of the death of her grandfather. She quietly picked up her diploma a few days later. Nobody in the family said anything. The family might have made it easier for her by 1) allowing her to go through with graduation, then join the funeral; or 2) postponing family celebrations until the funeral was over.

### **Setting Fire to the Past**

After a long term, non-marriage relationship terminated, a woman went through a long period of depression and could not forget her boyfriend. Her therapist encouraged her to write those thoughts for an hour a day. After a few weeks, they categorized each by emotion. The therapist asked which she wanted to hold on to and which she wanted to forget. Then they burned the "negative emotions" cards which allowed her to put them behind her and remain thankful for the good ones.

### **Healing a Loss**

A couple who lost a child by miscarriage grieved so much that they decided to affirm life by planting a tree in their front yard. Gradually its growth turned their loss to hope. When it bloomed, they counted their blessings.

### **Adoption Day**

A New York City adopted child decided to affirm her parents by giving them "adoption papers." Then she asked for tickets to a Broadway show and began a yearly tradition remembering the day she came to their home.

### **Rape and Healing**

Two rape victims in Massachusetts put together a clothesline with T-shirts symbolic of community solidarity against violence and gongs/bells rung to remember victims and call the community to action.

### **Goodbye at Preschool**

A preschool teacher tapes events through the year and makes a "memories" tape for kids to remember through the summer.

### **Birth/Older Child**

Many families (esp. grandparents) give gifts or create special events for older siblings at the birth of the "cute little brother/sister."

### **Single at Thanksgiving**

Many singles alone during holidays overcome loneliness and give their holiday special meaning by volunteering time to help others. Singles who help serve Thanksgiving dinner to the homeless are among the unsung heroes of the society.

### **Shift Work**

Shift work breaks up routines and ruins traditional rituals for many families. Others make the most of the experience by making a point of sharing mealtimes, scheduling special times together, and calling during work breaks.

## **Enriching the Later Years RITUALS FOR LIFE REVIEW**

Recalling and appreciating life's events is an important task in later adulthood. Events which help grandparents, aunts and uncles or family friends to "process" their own histories can also help younger family members appreciate family themes and grow closer to elders. Lewis and Butler (1974) outlined several events from which family rituals can be developed:

### **Written or Taped Autobiographies**

The incidents, experiences, and people that are included in these autobiographies are significant. It's also important to be aware of what is not here (i.e., lost or repressed memories or emotional cutoff). Include not only work life (material accomplishments), but home and friendship life; also focus on both major events (weddings, births) and small events (painting the house, homework, hiking trips, lambing)

### **Pilgrimages**

If an older person is in good health, return trips to places where they grew up, went to school, raised a family, or went for vacations can raise pleasant memories. Sharing these events can not only mean quality time together, but unique learning opportunities for all generations. Someone should be designated "recorder" in order to capture the stories.

### **Reunions**

Getting together with high school or army buddies, family members or old friends can help elders see themselves in perspective and be appreciated by those closest to them.

### **Geneology**

A family tree can give a person (and family) a sense of continuity with the past and reinforce family themes and ethnic identity. The search itself may be fun as elders place ads in newspapers, explore old documents and cemeteries.

### **Scrapbooks, Photo Albums, Old Letters, Memorabilia**

A "this is your life" dedication is a great way to recognize an older person and create a family heirloom.



## **Stopping the Negative 'Marry'-Go-Round: Healing Aversive Communication**

Howard Markman, Clinical Psychologist at the University of Denver, identified four danger signs for couple relationships which probably apply to many types of settings. Signs include:

- 1) Escalation: When partners enter into a negative cycle of exchanging comments (complaints, gripes, sarcasm), they progressively "up the ante," creating a spiral of increasing anger and frustration.

Markman's studies (as well as those of many others) indicate that happy couples are not necessarily those who show more affection but those who are able to cut off negative cycles before they bring "marital meltdown."

### Suggested Solutions:

\*Call a "Stop-Action" to avoid the increasingly negative spiral

\*Set a time to discuss the issue(s) if you're too angry to deal with it now.

\*Use the Speaker-Listener Technique:

#### Speaker:

- 1) Speak for self, don't mindread
- 2) State ideas without going on and on
- 3) Stop and let your listener paraphrase to check for comprehension

#### Listener:

- 1) Paraphrase what you hear (allowing speaker to confirm the accuracy of your paraphrase)
- 2) Don't rebut. Focus on the speaker's message.

#### Speaker and Listener:

- 1) Let the speaker have the floor.
- 2) Let the speaker set the agenda until the listener accurately paraphrases and the case is made,
- 3) Take turns holding the floor.

- 2) Invalidation: Patterns of subtle or direct put-downs of thoughts, feelings, or the character of another.

Most dysfunctional families are "stuck" in emotion-driven cycles of "reaction." With energy caught up in put-downs, defensiveness, and trapping each other, little energy can be freed to appreciate others and build positive connections.

### Suggested Solutions:

\*Agree to ground rules of politeness (say what you can/want to do; appreciate; share conversation; ask questions; don't interrupt; speak honestly but with caring; criticize ideas, not person; focus on the present; see from your partner's viewpoint)

- 3) Withdrawal and Avoidance: Withdrawal behaviors as subtle as too-easily agreeing or profound as "turning

off" or "checking out" of an in an argument. Avoiding discussions in the first place suggests a concern about safety...or manipulation.

Research suggests that males are more likely to withdraw, perhaps due to a combination of their faster physiological arousal capacity and less thorough interpersonal skills socialization. Also, partners who withdraw usually describe their actions as "helping" (which it may in the heat of battle), but their partners make the opposite interpretation ("You don't want to talk... You don't care if we work together.")

### Suggested Solutions:

\*Schedule arguments, identify the specific issue, and stick to the issue

\*Use the XYZ Technique:

Describe the problem by saying:

"When X behavior happens in situation Y, I feel Z"

This focuses partners on a specific issue, clarifies feelings and separates them from behavior and does not "dump" responsibility for either on the listening partner.

\*Engage in Constructive Problem-Solving

Agenda Building: Prioritize and focus on one or two problems for discussion

Brainstorming: Turn specific gripes into positive suggestions for relationship solutions (without making any judgments as to which will work)

Agree/Compromise: Discuss solutions and select the best one for both of you

Follow-up: Agree to try selected solutions for a given period. Compare notes and decide to continue or try something new.

- 4) Negative Interpretations: Consistent questioning of each other's motives, making constructive interchange nearly impossible and negative interactions more likely (and more intense).

Negative interpretations often arise from misunderstandings or fears which come from earlier experiences (i.e., childhood trauma, unhappy relationships). Sharing of personal histories, "hot buttons," and expectations provides a context for a partner to anticipate or respond to one's reaction.

### Suggested Solutions:

\*Discuss experiences related to "hidden issues" (caring and love, need for recognition, power and control, desire for acceptance, desire for acceptance/fear of rejection)

\*Clarify the meaning of commitment for each partner

Source: Howard Markman; Susan Blumberg; & Scott Stanley. (1993). PREP Manual for Couples. For an excellent set of videotapes on dangers and skill-solutions (\$60), call 1-800-366-0166.

Note: Suggested Solutions may be employed at any point to address relationship dangers.

## ***The Ritual of Resource-Seeking*** **IDEAS FOR TEACHING FAMILY PROCESS**

If you don't make time for it, you won't get it done. So leave an extra hour on that next city/bookstore trip, carve out a few minutes to read (at work and at home), and make some time to talk over new ideas with your friends and colleagues. For some thought-provoking discussions and practical skills, try these books:

Altergott. (Ed., 1993). One World, Many Families. Minneapolis, MN: National Council on Family Relations, 3989 Central Avenue, NE, Suite 550, Minneapolis, MN 55421. (612) 781-9331. International Year of the Family publication featuring global issues affecting families.

John Bradshaw. (1988). Bradshaw On: The Family. and Creating Love. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications. Bradshaw has his shortcomings as a "blamer of the past," but insights into family system dynamics and how to move beyond your family's dysfunctions are worth the reading.

Carlfred Broderick. (1993). Understanding Family Processes. Newbury Park, CA: Sage. (\$24) A text complete with readable (although thorough) explanations of research on family systems--This is your best bet for an update, Duncan!

Reynold Bean. (1992). Cooperation, Social Responsibility, and Other Skills. Santa Cruz, CA: ETR.

Betty Lou Bettner & Amy Lew. (1992). Raising Kids Who Can: Using Family Meetings to Nurture Responsible, Cooperative, Caring, and Happy Children. New York: HarperCollins. (\$7)

Claire Brindis. (1991). Teens Educating Teens: Teen Advocate Training Manual. Santa Cruz, CA: ETR. (\$60)

Patrick Carnes. (1983). Understanding Us: Family Development. Littleton, CO: Interpersonal Communications. A classic in family enrichment, complete with theory and exercises.

Creative Use of Conflict. (1988). Winston-Salem, NC: The Association for Couples in Marriage Enrichment (P.O. Box 10596, Winston-Salem, NC 27108; 1-800-634-8325). A brief brochure packed with insights for marriage and other interpersonal settings.

Milton R. Cudney & Robert E. Hardy. (1991). Self-Defeating Behaviors. New York, NY: HarperCollins. (\$10) Insights into attitude and interaction patterns which create negative results.

Carl Dunst; Carol Trivette; & Angela Deal. (1988). Enabling and Empowering Families. Brookline, MA: Brookline Books. A concise, in-depth review of the principles of family development and family systems theory, with implications for working with people, especially families with special needs children.

Roger Fisher & Scott Brown. (1988). Getting Together: Building Relationships as We Negotiate. New York, NY: Penguin. Practical guide to applying communications skills in business and other settings.

Roger Fisher & William Ury. (1991). Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In. New York, NY: Penguin. One of the most widely used communications books in business and social services.

F.D. Fincham; L.O. Fernandes; & K. Humphries. (1993). Communication in Relationships. Champaign, IL: Research Press.

Edwin Friedman. (1985). Generation to Generation. New York: Guilford. Discussion from a witty rabbi/therapist of family systems in churches and synagogues--should be insightful for other "volunteer-driven" organizations like Extension.

David Johnson. (1988). Reaching Out. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall. Excellent descriptions and exercises for interpersonal skill-building.

Patricia Kramer. (1993). Dynamics of Relationships. and Discovering Self-Confidence and Discovering Self-Expression and Communication. Kramer also does workshops for schools and workplaces on avoiding violence, sexual harassment. Equal Partners/The Self-Esteem Institute, 3371 Beaverwood Lane, Silver Spring, MD 20906 (301) 871-9665.

David Mace. (1982). Love and Anger in Marriage. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. A perceptive explanation of the relation between closeness and emotions, positive and negative.

Sherrod Miller; Daniel Wackman; Elam Nunnally; & Phyllis Miller. (1988). Connecting with Self and Others. and Talking and Listening Together. (1992). Littleton, CO: Interpersonal Communication Programs. An encyclopedia of communication skills teaching concepts and exercises.

Augustus Napier. (1978). The Family Crucible. New York, NY: Bantam. (\$8) The best "starter" book for understanding family systems--full of stories and "user-friendly" discussions.

Sharon Price & Barbara Elliott. (Eds., 1993). Vision 2010: Families and Health Care. Minneapolis, MN: National Council on Family Relations. Health care reform issues seen from a family perspective.

Priscilla Prutzman; M. Leonard Burger; Lee Stern; & Gretchen Bodenhamer. (1987). The Friendly Classroom for a Small Planet: A Handbook of Creative Approaches to Living and Problem Solving for Children. Nyack, NY: Children's Creative Response to Conflict Program.

Virginia Satir. (1988). The New Peoplemaking. Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books. (\$22) Update of a classic discussion/ exercise manual on how families work.

## Organizations That Focus on Family Processes

Boys Town Social Skills Training  
Boys Town, NE 68010  
(402) 498-1593

--Training and curricula on a variety of skills for adults & kids

Burrell Foundation  
1300 Bradford Parkway  
Springfield, MO 65804  
(417) 885-5252

--Jack Pransky's "Prevention" book which outlines principles and describes programs for helping people help themselves before problems occur.

Children of Alcoholics Foundation, Inc.  
P.O. Box 4185 Grand Central Station  
New York, NY 10163  
(212) 754-0656

--"Discovering Normal" parent education program for adult children of alcoholics.

The Children's Hearings Project  
Cambridge Children's Service  
99 Bishop Allen Drive  
Cambridge, MA 02139  
(617) 661-4701

--Family mediation video and guidebook

Child Trends  
2100 M Street, NW, Suite 610  
Washington, DC 20036  
(202) 466-4764

--"Identifying Successful Families" overview of traits and measures of effective family functioning.

Committee for Children  
172 20th Avenue  
Seattle, WA 98122-5862  
(1-800-634-4449)

--training seminars and resources on alternatives to violence and sexual abuse.

Conflict Resolution Resources for Schools and Youth  
Community Board Program  
149 Ninth Street  
San Francisco, CA 94103  
(415) 552-1250

--Training programs and materials

Family Impact Seminar/AAMFT  
17171 K Street, NW, Suite 407  
Washington, DC 20006  
(202) 429-1825

--Research studies and policy recommendations on a variety of issues, available on Gopher (via Extension/Univ.MN/Child & Family Network) as well as the above address. Titles listed:

National Institute for Dispute Resolution  
1901 L Street, NW, Suite 600  
Washington, DC 20035  
(202) 466-4764

--Resources on solving problems cooperatively.

Rainbow House Institute for Choosing Non-Violence  
P.O. Box 29019  
Chicago, IL  
(312) 521-5501

--Curricula and training in helping children learn positive ways of solving problems and working out conflicts.

## Your Vote: Training Trends

Setting the agenda for training will be an important goal of the SUMMIT. As we think about preparing to interpret HDFS (Human Development/Family Studies) to audiences throughout the state, the following questions might be of use to us:

- How important is concept knowledge on human development and family systems dynamics (i.e., principles, assumptions, research and theory concepts underlying educational programs)? Circle one.
  - Critical for grasping and presenting practical implications
  - Interesting, but practical skills are really what counts
  - Pretty much worthless in preparing/presenting programs
- Which of the following is important as a context for offering Extension programming on process-oriented topics (communication, conflict resolution, problem solving, decision-making, etc.)? Circle all that apply.
  - government (city, state, federal employees)
  - workplaces (management or line employees)
  - schools (administration, teachers, staff, or students)
- What is the best time to begin teaching process-oriented topics? Circle one.
 

a) infancy and toddlerhood	e) young adulthood
b) preschool	f) middle age
c) school-age	g) later adulthood
d) teenage	
- What are the greatest impediments to learning communication and conflict resolution skills? Circle all that apply.
  - Genetics (i.e., inborn personality or gender trait limits)
  - Age (i.e., cognitive or behavioral limits)
  - Socialization (i.e., unbringing in home, peer group)
  - Environment (i.e., current home or work setting)
  - Openness to Change (i.e., current disposition)
  - Other (nominate your own: \_\_\_\_\_)

If you can, make copies and have everyone in the office fill out this questionnaire. Use items as discussion starters in educational groups.

## PARADOXES: A PARTING THOUGHT

### *Cycles That Free, Frustrate, and Leave You Flat*

Life is ironic: Always turning us in directions we don't expect. Like riding a bull, we know what to expect--sort of. But like Mrs. Doubtfire, one thing leads to another and we get caught up in playing roles we never wanted. When we can't ask for what we want, life becomes a series of detours...not scenic ones, either.

Over thirty years ago, psychologist William Schutz identified three basic needs of persons in relationships:

1. **Affection:** Affirmation and nurturance, or "getting and giving warm fuzzies." Infants need emotional attachment and care as much as food and drink. Studies of elders living alone and heart-attack recovery patients suggest that companionship of pets even aids mental and physical health. It's as if that child inside each of us needs to know that we're worth something in this world. Paradoxically, we know that worth only when we risk rejection and when we are willing to affirm others. Be sure to do some act of random kindness to someone today.
2. **Belongingness:** Affiliation and "sense of place" or "finding your niche." Kids join gangs, so say police, researchers, and youth directors, to find the family connections which may be missing at their address. At-home "connections" (giving kids chores, decision-making opportunities, pride in their place in the family) at an early age is better than leaving it to the "Department of Corrections" later on. Find out what your child likes to do and let your time and energy "belong" to him or her alone a couple times a week.
3. **Control:** Influence and initiative, or "a chance to make a difference." Milton Seligman, whose animal experiments on "learned helplessness" illustrated the insight that unpredictable punishments can destroy hope, has a new best-seller, "Learned Optimism," in which he encourages persons to take (and share) control of what they can do. Look for creative possibilities at home and work and, taking the other guy's viewpoint, do something to empower him/her.

Fortunately, we don't need each of these needs fulfilled by everybody we meet. If only one significant other offers caring, loyalty, or permission to be and do, our needs may be met. (Recall Miller's admonition from p. 2 that "if it only takes one person, that person is me." Yet if one significant other denies our humanity, we may become caught in a cycle of seeking approval from one who will not give it.

Positive cycles which boost self-esteem and free our energy:

- 1) Meet needs in straightforwardly, without hidden agendas. My Eighth Grade science teacher cared so much about kids and his subject that he spent out-of-class time teaching us about Nature in the field, with no expectations for administrative or kids' praise.

- 2) Meet needs with a healthy balance of give and take. Elders who understand this principle often want to give to those who help, even if it's time and talk. Allowing them to give enriches the relationship.
- 3) Cultivate both partners' capacities to give and take. Positive parenting, modeling affection, belonging and responsibility helps both children and parents grow into more complete and creative persons.

Negative cycles, which lead to frustration are:

- 1) Frought with indirection (not straight talk), withdrawal, or open attack. In fact, many persons who "politely avoid" direct complaints or use the "silent treatment" do so to avoid arguments. Paradoxically, the same intense emotions which cause us to care, also cause us to become angry when we feel unloved, not included, or controlled. Complaints allow feelings to air and relationships to grow; cutting off complaints before they become personal attacks is the key to using negatives effectively.
- 2) One-sided or rigid, never taking a human shape or allowing for growth. Abused spouses or children often try harder and harder for approval which never comes only to find themselves trapped in an "all give-no take" relationship.
- 3) Emotionally draining. The unpredictability of indirect aggression or sudden withdrawal and the tension of escalating arguments quickly exhausts energy and patience. However funny they may appear, most of us would not want to be Tom and Roseanne or "The Honeymooners."

Cycles which leave us "flat" typically involve a compromise of both conflict (i.e., "Let's not talk so we don't argue") and closeness (i.e., "marriage of convenience). Constant counting of rewards and costs (i.e., literal equality) puts fairness above caring and often leaves persons empty.

The good news is that we can learn to avoid or manage cycles of negative emotions and create relationships in which basic needs are met. Honesty, with compassion and respect are essential. Time together, empathic listening, and thoughtful gestures all help build positive cycles. Rituals involving humor, fellowship, and concern in office environments can contribute to positive cycles. Staying calm, avoiding revenge and gossip all "cut off" negative cycles. Rituals involving conflict resolution and reconciliation enhance work or volunteer activities. Like my dad always said, "Anything worth knowing, takes time." But when we feel loved, included, and free to be and do, the work is well worth it.

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**"Thinking of their reaction as a response to your action provides information about how effective you are being with them."**

--Sherrod Miller  
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