

# How to establish a family tradition

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The 4th of July is my favorite holiday. Every year, we spend Independence Day at our city park, celebrating as John Adams predicted in 1776, “with Pomp and Parade, with Shews, Games, Sports, Guns, Bells, Bonfires and Illuminations.” Mr. Adams might be a little alarmed by all of the tacky tattoos and tube tops that seem to accompany these celebrations, but I bet Benjamin Franklin would get a kick out of the whole event. So do we.

We wave and collect salt water taffy at the parade, play at the playground, read and relax in the shade. We buy shaved ice, listen to an evening concert – complete with cannons for the 1812 Overture – and cheer on the fireworks. Best of all, we spend the day visiting with extended family and greeting friends and neighbors.



This family tradition resembles one from my childhood. Every year, my family would travel to my parents’ hometown in Southern Utah. We attended the parade and then spent the morning with family and friends at the park. We didn’t spend all day there, but we always finished the day with a family barbeque at my aunt’s house, where we had a good view of the fireworks.



When I married, we celebrated Independence Day in different ways every year, usually with extended family. In 2010, we came up with this idea to spend the whole day in the park. We enjoyed it so much, we have done it every year since. It has become a tradition we all get excited about as the holiday approaches.

**Traditions are important for strong families.** Families grow closer as they spend time together and make good memories. Family traditions give children stability and identity. [Dr. William Doherty](#) explained in *The Intentional Family* that families who purposefully maintain important rituals and traditions will stay connected, despite increasingly busy lifestyles.



# How to establish a family tradition

## 1. Search your history for ideas

Opportunities to create traditions arise when couples marry, have children and as those children grow. Parents bring the traditions of their families into a marriage and that's the perfect place to start the conversation. Local traditions of communities where your family is from or has lived

may provide additional inspiration.

Family traditions may be started deliberately, such as a decision to read stories at bedtime, be home for family dinner or have family movie night every Friday. Those are all traditions at our house. Other traditions may emerge over time, such as our hometown 4th of July celebration.

## 2. How does the proposed tradition fit into our existing or desired family culture?

Not every tradition is a winner. When I was growing up, my family attempted to reenact the Christmas story from the Bible, which was a tradition for several families we knew. Being a family of four daughters with a bit of a sarcastic streak, we had trouble filling all the roles with the reverence they deserved. We abandoned that tradition after one or two attempts and found ways to observe the religious side of Christmas that were more appropriate for our family.

Independence Day at the park is not for everyone, but it suits our family well. We enjoy getting out of the house. Holiday weekends are times to celebrate, rather than accomplish home improvement projects. We are engaged in our community and we appreciate its personality.

## 3. Keep it simple

Family traditions should be fun events that everyone looks forward to. If they are too much work, especially for one person, then it will be difficult to continue the tradition over time.

On July 3rd, I went to the park with the kids and spent 15 minutes reserving our space with stakes and "Caution" tape. We planned a picnic for one meal and ate the other at a nearby restaurant. Everyone in the family packed their own toys and reading material. We brought only as much stuff as we could carry to and from the van in one trip.



#### **4. Don't force it**

It's worthwhile to try out new family traditions and see what sticks. However, avoid pinning your happiness on the success of a particular tradition. What sounds great in theory may not work well in practice. When spouses have cherished childhood traditions that compete, compromise may be required.

My husband doesn't care much for parades. For him, the payoff doesn't justify the crowds and parking hassle. When our daughter was two, he decided not to attend the 4th of July parade with us, thinking it would not be a big deal. I was a little miffed at first, but the feeling festered, and by the time she and I came home, I was really angry at him for skipping out on something that mattered to me.

We got over it, and I realized that I couldn't fully enjoy the event if my husband didn't want to be there. We both lightened up. Our current arrangement is working well, because I get the traditional parade and park experience I love, and there is still plenty of time in the day for him to read and nap under a shade tree, play with the kids and participate in the other activities he enjoys.

#### **5. Go with the flow**

We really enjoy this family tradition, but there may be years when it doesn't make sense. In 2008, we had the opportunity to spend Independence Day in a free cabin near Yellowstone National Park. If that chance came around again, we'd jump on it. When my kids were newborns, our park tradition would not have been as fun for me. When they are teenagers, we may need to adapt again. Some family traditions stand the test of time, but some may only serve their purpose for a few years. I hope our family dinner tradition lasts forever, but I know that bedtime stories won't. How long will this holiday tradition last? Time will tell, but the memories will last a lifetime.

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