

Bright Futures: Family Matters

"Govern a family as you would cook a small fish - very gently." Chinese proverb

Family Rules, Routines and Rituals



Rules, routines and rituals are important parts of family life and are also beneficial to a child and family's health. Routines are regular patterns families adopt to manage daily lives, like planning family meals. Rituals are traditions families inherit or create from their values and experiences - like birthday and holiday celebrations. Rituals and routines provide children with a sense of identity, stability and consistency.¹

"A 2002 review of 32 studies affirms that family routines (such as bedtime and dinner time) and family rituals (such as birthdays and family reunions) are associated with marital satisfaction, adolescents' sense of personal identity, academic achievement, children's health and stronger family relationships. . . The review does not suggest that any particular routine is crucial, but the presence of family routines and rituals in general is beneficial."² (Barbara Fiese, et. al; *A Review of 50 Years of Research on Naturally Occurring Family Routines and Rituals*, Syracuse U, *J of Family Psychology*, Vol. 16, No. 4) Examples of routines/rituals your family might adopt include²:



- ♥ Family meals together each week
- ♥ Yearly family vacations
- ♥ Age-appropriate chores for children
- ♥ Stories before bedtime and after tooth-brushing
- ♥ Volunteering, as a family!
- ♥ Consider starting a new ritual for family holidays

FAMILY RULES AND SPECIAL NEEDS

Helping children with special needs understand family rules can sometimes be challenging. It may be helpful to have three levels of family rules:

1. *The "have-to's"* A short list of non-negotiable rules that must be followed, no matter what. These may include using appropriate language and getting to school on time.
2. *The "should-but-don't-have-to's"* A longer list of activities that can be discussed or negotiated.
3. *Free choices* These are decisions children are free to make on their own. In creating these rules, children realize that they may have more independence and decision-making power than they thought.³

FAMILY RULES for YOUTH

Here are some ideas about the kinds of things families might discuss with older children.⁴

- ♥ Cleaning up after eating
- ♥ Agreement not to use alcohol, tobacco or drugs
- ♥ Use of the phone, computer, or car
- ♥ Having friends in the house or apartment
- ♥ Answering the door

"Children who are used to clear rules and consistent consequences are less likely to risk using alcohol and other drugs as they get older. They are also more likely to have the self-confidence to say "no..." However, "studies show that children are at greater risk for drug abuse in homes where punishment is too severe or where there is no discipline..."⁵ Here are some ideas about ways to make family rules work:

- ♥ Create rules together. Kids who are part of making rules are more likely to follow them.
- ♥ Give every rule a consequence (what happens if the rule is broken). Try to involve your child in this, too.
- ♥ Choose consequences that are important to your child right now ("no calls or e-mail tonight" or "no television for a week").
- ♥ Be sure rules are clear
- ♥ Hold regular family meetings
- ♥ Decide on positive rewards for honoring family rules.⁶

Information adapted from:

1. <http://www.childcareaware.org/en/dailyparent/vol5/>
2. <http://mentalhealth.about.com/cs/familyresources/a/rituals.htm>
3. <http://www.schwablearning.org/Articles.asp?r=338>
4. <http://cecommerce.uwex.edu/pdfs/NCR59702.PDF>
5. www.bbblocks.samhsa.gov/Grownups/Rules/tips.aspx,
6. http://www.mass.gov/dph/bsas/publications/familyguide/infosheets/3_rules.htm

Family Voices is a national grassroots network of families and friends speaking on behalf of children with special health needs. Our children are also part of the wider world of children. With an improving understanding of MCH grant, Family Voices works to encourage partnerships between families and professionals for children's good health. *Bright Futures: Family Matters* is a digest of articles and news clips to share with families, family organizations, and our professional partners. Check out our Family Voices web sites at: www.brightfuturesforfamilies.org and www.familyvoices.org

Partners...



Stepfamily Association of America

SSA, incorporated in 1979, has grown into an active national association comprised of people and organizations from across the United States, Canada, and other parts of the world. Its purposes are to:

- ♥ develop and disseminate research-based information and materials
- ♥ design, implement, and evaluate opportunities for support and education
- ♥ advocate for financial, institutional, political and social changes that support stepfamilies.

Stepfamily Association of America

650 J Street, Suite 205

Lincoln, NE 68508

1-800-735-0329/fax 1-477-8317

www.saafamilies.org



Family Resource Corner

- ♥ The Environmental Kids Club, sponsored by the Federal Environmental Protection Agency, provides kids with information about plants and animals, science, recycling and more. Also includes information about student internships and careers in environmental science.
<http://www.epa.gov/kids/>
- ♥ Reading is Fundamental, the nation's oldest non-profit children's literacy organization, features summer reading lists, a summer reading challenge, and tips to start your own book club at home.
<http://www.rif.org/summer/> **SPANISH**
- ♥ The American Camp Association (formerly the American Camping Association) is a community of camp professionals who, for nearly 100 years, have joined together to share knowledge and experience and to ensure the quality of camp programs. Site includes information about finding the best camp for your child and a camp planner.
<http://www.acacamps.org/> **SPANISH**
- ♥ LDOnLine, a Web site on learning disabilities for parents, teachers and other professionals, features information about finding good summer activities for children with learning disabilities and/or ADHD.
www.ldonline.org/ld_indepth/summer/

What's new in research?



Study: Kids can be trained to eat better

The National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute has sponsored the largest study ever to track the impact of childhood nutrition education. It also backs a major new government campaign that aims to keep preteens from becoming overweight by training both kids and parents in good nutrition. A key element to the training process was not to forbid foods that children find yummy, but to teach balance - that there are "go" foods for everyday, "slow" foods for a few times a week, and "whoa" foods to eat once in a while. For information on this study, please visit the Journal of Pediatrics website at:

<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/115/6/1723>

"We Can!", a \$2.6 million campaign, aims to teach these food lessons and tips on fitting in physical activity to all 8- to 13-year-olds. For more information:

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/>

Tidbits for the Month - Tick Safety

Summer is a time when many people spend more time outdoors, so it's important to remember how to prevent tick bites. Here are some simple steps you can take to protect yourself and your family:

- ♥ Avoid tick-infested areas
- ♥ Wear light-colored clothing (so you can see ticks)
- ♥ Use chemical repellent with DEET or permethrin on children over 2 months of age - avoid hands, eyes and mouth - and wear protective clothing
- ♥ Perform daily tick checks on yourself and your children to protect yourself against tick-borne diseases



For more information, check out:

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/ticktips2005/>



Highlights for the next
Bright Futures: Family Matters

Family Voices wishes you and your families a safe and healthy summer!

Share your news with others!

We're always looking for news and activities about family organization and programs to post. Share exciting events and activities about your organization that will be interesting to others. Email Kati Cawley at kcawley@fcsn.org or fax at (617) 572-2094 with your tidbits or to subscribe.

Editor: Kati Cawley, Betsy Anderson, Barbara Popper