

Daily Union – Saturday, January 3, 2015
Vol. 3 Issue 1: Building Strong Families – Part 2

Last week I shared the importance and benefits of having family traditions. As we begin a new year, consider what traditions you and your family hold dear and reflect on their value to you as an individual and as part of the family unit as a whole. Each tradition you have falls in to one or more of the three major types of family traditions: traditions of connection, traditions of celebration, and traditions of community.

Family traditions of **connection** are centered on regular, consistent opportunities for family members to share meaningful experiences together. They build a sense of belonging and unity in the family.

Family meals are one way to offer these connections. Think about meals in your own home. Who plans and prepares them? When and how is the meal served? How do you promote discussion and what topics do you talk about?

For homes with young children, the morning and bedtime routines are important for building connections. What happens before everyone goes their different directions in the morning? How does your family connect before going to bed?

Family vacations can serve to connect the family as well. Where does the family go and who does the planning? How is vacation time spent... time together, apart... or divided? My family took vacations every summer. Sometimes we children had no idea where we were going. Dad liked to keep it a mystery. As we got in the car, we would ask again "Where are we going?" and dad would only say "north" (or any one of the directions). That would make us think about all the places we might be going that were north. As a young child, I thought knowing the destination was critical. As an adult with my own children, however, I now realize the destination wasn't nearly as important as the process. Vacations gave us the opportunity to have a meaningful experience together – one that we "discovered" as we made the journey.

A second type of tradition is one of **celebration**. These traditions consist of specific occasions that are observed by family members in appreciation for an event, person, holiday, or chosen memory.

Some examples of occasions where this type of tradition applies might include celebrating birthdays, family reunions, mother's day and/or father's day, or holidays just to name a few. This time of year, your family may get together to enjoy the college bowl games. I have a friend that has gone to every bowl game that K-State has played in for at least the last 15 years with her 75+ year old mom and dad. Perhaps that

doesn't work for your family, but your family really likes watching football together. Perhaps this might be the ideal year for you to start a new tradition around celebrating this playoff game event.

Remember though, that a family tradition is only beneficial if everybody enjoys and participates. Don't use this article as your defense for starting a new tradition that few others in your family will enjoy 😊!

The third type of family tradition, **community** is all about how the family members connect with each other and the larger community around them. A well-known Junction City community tradition that many families participate in is the Sundown Salute. This annual 4th of July celebration is the culmination of hard work from volunteers and citizens as well as the financial support of area businesses committed to fueling and sustaining the spirit of Patriotism that is part of the lifeblood of our community.

Family traditions of community may also include religious traditions. Family members may engage in activities in their homes that demonstrate their religious beliefs, but they also engage in religious activities on a larger scale by attending special services served by the larger religious community they are connected to.

Weddings would be another example of a family tradition that reaches beyond to a community. By inviting friends and co-workers to these events, the family is reaching beyond their own family unit to share this important tradition.

Building and maintaining meaningful family traditions takes careful consideration and effort. Today's families come in all shapes, sizes, and configurations. The family traditions that work for your parents may not work in your own immediate family. Blended families, single-parent families, multi-generational families, or families with different ethnic backgrounds may need to be more creative than ever to determine what would work best for them in their specific circumstances. When you bring two people together from varied backgrounds, it is important to take time getting to know and develop an understanding of the family traditions they were raised with. Together, you will need to determine which traditions to continue and likely, which traditions to introduce.

Set goals for building specific family traditions. Define them within each type of tradition; connection, celebration, or community. Once you create a list of options, choose two or three that you want to discuss with your family members. Be intentional in creating and maintaining those family traditions that build up and strengthen individuals and the family as a unit.

It takes both time and effort to make activities or events become tradition. They have to be personal (and often unique) to each family unit based on your interests and resources. Be patient and flexible so that the tradition serves your family and you don't serve the tradition!

Best wishes to you and your family as you continue or introduce traditions that make your family unit strong. For more information about families, contact me at the Geary County Extension office at 238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!