



## Snow Place Like Home

Thoughts of family and home are a frequent theme during the holiday season. Magazine ads and television commercials show peaceful, snow-covered landscapes and depict warm family moments as they promote their products. Their marketing targets our emotions related to happy times and fond memories. Maybe it reminds you of your own family traditions.

Family traditions are activities we do repeatedly that have special meaning or significance to those involved. Research tells us that sharing family rituals strengthens the family. Traditions provide a sense of stability and a feeling of belonging. Many family traditions are centered on holidays or religious beliefs.

Think about the traditions in your family. Is there a special activity that you remember, or perhaps special foods are served at family meals? Does your family still celebrate in the same way as when you were a child? Traditions can change as families change. We may not be able to have the entire family get together at a big home in the country where the snow is gently falling. Maybe grandma is no longer able to prepare a meal for everyone, and maybe she lives in a condo in a sunny climate! However, you can still focus on the important things—spending time together as a family and taking part in activities that are important to you. It is okay to make the meal a potluck, or even to use paper plates instead of heirloom china if it helps reduce stress and allows for family activities.

One thing to remember when observing family traditions is to include children in activities and explain to them the importance or meaning of what you do. If you observe a special cultural or religious event, teach the children why your family does this and why it is important to your heritage or beliefs. This will help reinforce the sense of belonging for the children. Even something as simple as making a special recipe together becomes more meaningful if you talk about how you made this with your mother or grandmother.

You can also create new traditions as the family changes. Think about activities that fit into your lifestyle and reinforce your family values and beliefs. Sometimes new traditions are created as generations shift and more extended family activities evolve.

Some ideas for family activities that could become traditions might include:

- Bake and decorate cookies together to give as gifts; or, if you want a healthier option, make up small fruit baskets and decorate them.
- Have a family craft activity and make holiday ornaments or decorations together. Make extras and go with the children to give them to elderly or homebound neighbors.
- Participate in a community service activity together as a family. Let the children observe that your family sees the importance of helping others.

- Begin a family reading time. Have a regular time where different family members read to the children.

Many family traditions are related to meals. Research shows us that shared mealtimes are beneficial to families. Whether it is a holiday meal or any day, make it a family priority to share meals. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, shared dinner times as often as possible can be a way to strengthen families and support children's development. Children who share meals with families on a regular basis tend to eat healthier diets than those who do not. And family mealtimes promote family communication.

Here are some tips for increasing the number of shared family mealtimes:

- Make it a family priority. Maybe you cannot manage to have the whole family at every meal, but try for at least three or four times a week together.
- Be flexible. Shared meals do not have to be a feast. It is better to have a simple meal and be able to spend it together than to stress out preparing a big meal.
- Get the kids involved. Have the children help plan and prepare the meal. Even very young children can help with some tasks, and it helps them feel that sense of belonging.

So whether you are heading for the family homestead or a sunny vacation spot, remember that it is the family time together, sharing traditions and memories that makes it, "Snow Place Like Home."

**Prepared by: Amy Griswold, University of Illinois Extension family life educator, Macomb Center**

*Reference: University of Illinois Extension website: Parenting 24/7; Family Rituals and Traditions*