

CREATING FAMILY TRADITIONS



An interactive guide for autistic families



Learn more about ASD and strong families at www.ausm.org.

Why do we create traditions?

Connecting generations
Sharing values
Building relationships
Providing comfort and certainty
Building identity

How do we create traditions?

Some parents find that the traditions they expected to continue don't fit well with their autistic child. It's easy to get frustrated when that happens. However, there are traditions that will work for any family, and this guide will help you to find options that bring your family together and meet a variety of needs. Try brainstorming the answers to the questions below with the whole family.

- What do you want to achieve? Look at the whys from above. Traditions can be for more than one reason, but when brainstorming it can help to focus on one goal at a time. Which goals are you hoping your traditions achieve?
- What ways can you make that goal personal?

EXAMPLE

Let's say you want traditions that continue your values. You might think of the values you'd like to continue. For example, if service is a value, maybe you volunteer together once a month. Take it one step further by connecting your service to a family interest. If your family loves animals, maybe you volunteer at the Humane Society.

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Helpful Ways to Brainstorm

Common Times For Traditions

- Daily
- Monthly
- Weekly
- Life Changes
- Holiday

Use these lists to think about the types of traditions you might want, or the times and places you may want the tradition to take place. Things that repeat work well because repetition creates ritual.

What times/routines happen similarly each day?

- Bedtime or wake up time
- Mealtimes
- Going to school or coming home from school

Types of Traditions

- Physical
- Social
- Mental
- Spiritual
- Just for the couple
(or the parent if there's one of you)

Things that happen each week/month/year:

- Holidays
- Days off
- Weekends
- Vacations

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Final Tips

General guidance:

- **Don't go overboard: start with one or two**
- **Traditions can change or evolve over time**
- **Incorporate some from history but make some of your own**

Including Autism

Sometimes your autistic child or family member can take the lead. One autistic strength is routine. Those routines can become traditions.

Does your autistic family member already have routines and rituals? Is there a way your whole family can participate together to create a tradition?

Example: Your autistic family member likes to wear a specific color on a specific day of the week. Your whole family could get on board with Teal Tuesdays as a small family tradition.

Another option is to include or honor autistic preferences when creating traditions. For example, if you're going to do a specific meal on the same day each week (many families do Taco Tuesday), consider choosing one that's a favorite of the autistic member of your household.

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Worksheets

Use these pages to help you brainstorm new traditions for your family.

What purpose do you want your new tradition to serve? Mark or circle one main focus.

- Connecting generations
- Sharing values
- Building relationships
- Providing comfort and certainty
- Building identity

Brainstorm how that focus can be personal. What values or identity do you want to build? Which generations do you want to connect? Whose relationships can you strengthen and how do those people feel connected? What provides your family with comfort and certainty? Deepen this brainstorm by connecting your answers to specific interests or traits of your family, like volunteering at an animal shelter if you are animal lovers.

Suggestions

- Once per week meals (Taco Tuesday)
- “Special time” (mommy/daddy date once a month)
- Family walk
- Bedtime stories
- Going to the library together
- A special gift or time together on a child's birthday
- Date night once per month
- Eating dinner together
- Going caroling during the holidays
- Baking or cooking together
- Annual photo shoot
- Secret handshake
- Volunteering together
- Family prayer or spiritual time
- A bedtime ritual with a hug or a kiss
- Family game night
- Weekend breakfasts
- Family meeting
- Box of goals (create and refresh goals each month)
- First day of school photos
- Carving pumpkins in fall
- Sharing what you're grateful for on holidays
- Throw regrets in the fire on New Year's Eve

Your turn!

With your family, write down ideas for traditions that fall in each of these areas. Pick one or two to start with, then try it out!

Daily

Monthly

Yearly

Milestones

Holidays

Resources and Citations

Citations

The Dad Train: <https://thedadtrain.com/family-rituals/>

Very Well Family: <https://www.verywellfamily.com/family-rituals-meaning-examples-3288187>

Psychology Today: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/influx/201405/5-ways-create-family-traditions>

Art of Manliness: <https://www.artofmanliness.com/articles/creating-a-positive-family-culture-the-importance-of-establishing-family-traditions/>

Additional Resources

AuSM Support Groups: <https://ausm.org/therapy/support-groups/>

WisconSIBS: <https://wisconsibs.org/>