

## THE Power of Rituals

With the holidays approaching, you are looking forward to family traditions – a nighttime drive to view neighborhood Christmas lights, sampling the same Thanksgiving apple pie recipe you have enjoyed for the last 30 years, picking out your 2003 ornament at a store you visit once a year – or are you? It's easy to forgo rituals when you start to feel swamped by a chronic illness, but don't. Rituals are a central part of life, says Evan Imber-Black, PhD, director of the Center for Families and Health at the Ackerman Institute for the Family, New York.

Rituals keep generations connected, break up the monotony of life and make memories. They also help us to "visualize" what's going on in our relationships, letting us know if they need mending. "Avoiding long-established rituals is an important signal that relationships need attention," says Imber-Black. "It's extremely important to develop rituals that fit with your particular situation and to know that memorable rituals don't have to be elaborate."

As you evaluate your rituals this holiday season, consider incorporating these four general types of rituals:

- Family traditions, including birthdays, anniversaries and celebrations that occur inside the family.
- Holiday celebrations involving both family and the outside world, such as Thanksgiving and Christmas.
- Life-cycle rituals, including confirmations, graduations or funerals, as well as smaller milestones, such as a child's lost tooth.
- Daily rituals, involving greetings, a morning hug or an evening stroll. These rituals provide a sense of rhythm, express who we are and help ease transitions in family relationships.

Keeping rituals can be simple. No matter what, be sure to keep your favorite rituals to celebrate your life.

— LINDA RICHARDS

# Tips on Keeping New Year's Resolutions

**O**n January 1, more than 100 million Americans will promise to change their

"evil" ways. But by March, 37 percent will have already broken their New Year's resolutions, according to a University of Washington survey.

How can you keep your resolutions and finally keep your promises to yourself? Start by gearing yourself up now for the promises you will make on January 1, and then:

**HAVE THE COMMITMENT TO CHANGE.** Don't make a list of resolutions because it's New Year's Day and you feel you must. Do it because you have a deep desire to finally make a change in your life. Promise yourself as if you were promising your company that the job will get done.

**SET GOALS, BUT NOT TOO MANY.** Yes, you may want to lose weight, eat healthier, quit smoking, cut back on alcohol, control your debt and bring peace to the world, but too many resolutions will throw you off track. Focus on one or two major goals and try to get through them by, say, June. Then you can finish the year with a couple more resolutions you would like to tackle.

**SET REALISTIC GOALS.** Taking control of your weight and eating healthier is a good goal. Wanting to lose 100 pounds by summer is not. Setting your goals too high will lead to disappointment when you can't attain them.

**BREAK BIG PROMISES DOWN INTO LITTLE GOALS.** Instead of focusing on a large goal and going cold turkey to achieve it, break it down into minor goals that you can follow by day, week or month. If your goal is to stop smoking, you don't have to go all or nothing on day one. Fulfilling resolutions is a process. Having smaller goals increases your confidence and helps you move on to the next level.

**GET BACK ON THE HORSE, IF YOU FALL OFF.** You're human; you have weaknesses. Just because you gave in to your temptation doesn't mean you should give up your goal and your hard work. Learn from the mistake and start again.

— LISSA POIROT

