



CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION
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November 26, 2008 – Family Traditions Important for Teens

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The Thanksgiving holiday brings loved ones together in a celebration of family and tradition. Family traditions are the “we always” that bind family members together. “We always have dinner at grandma’s house on Thanksgiving Day.” “We always each say something we’re thankful for as dad carves the turkey.” It is these unique “we always” traditions that help define families and create feelings of closeness, belonging, and connection.

Family traditions are especially important as children get older and enter the teenage years. Here are some reasons why.

Family traditions give teens a sense of security. Secure attachment to family is a cornerstone of healthy development. Traditions create security by reinforcing commitment to family. Teens make important decisions every day about things like how they will spend their time, who they will hang out with, and drug, alcohol, and tobacco use. Teens who are securely attached to their families are more likely to turn to them for guidance and support when faced with difficult issues.

Family traditions help teens learn about family values and beliefs. Families that come together to celebrate holidays like Thanksgiving demonstrate to young people that they value spending time together. By honoring traditions started by past generations, families preserve memories and help children understand that they are a part of something bigger than themselves. Family gatherings offer opportunities for family elders to share their beliefs and teach children lessons about family values that they can carry with them into adulthood.

Family traditions help teens build a sense of identity and belonging. Figuring out who you are and what groups you belong to is one of the most important tasks of adolescence. If teens don’t have healthy connections to family, friends, school, and organizations, they are likely to turn to unhealthy groups like inappropriate peers and gangs for a sense of belonging. Traditions build feelings of belonging and family unity that help teens define their sense of self.

Family traditions create opportunities for special memories. The repetitive nature of traditional gatherings and activities help children remember shared experiences that might otherwise be forgotten. As children get older, encourage them to take more active roles in preserving honored traditions. For example, if there is a tradition of making molasses cookies using great-grandma’s recipe, let teens take charge. If a teen has an interest in photography, hand over the camera and involve him or her in capturing memories on film. Enjoying time together as a family creates special memories that will last a lifetime.

Family traditions create a sense of optimism for the future. The predictability of longstanding family traditions provides something that children can count on. The “we always” of the Thanksgiving Day traditions that are unique to your family create feelings of stability and well-being that are especially important for teens. In an uncertain world, it is reassuring to know that some things remain the same. For many families this week, that may include pumpkin pie served with a heaping portion of love.

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