

Family Unity: Not Just a Good Idea, an Absolute Necessity

by

Sally Goldberg, Ph.D.

Question. Thanksgiving comes once a year with its wonderful message about family unity. Everyone gathers around the table and talks about how happy they are to be together. Then, no sooner is the holiday over, all is forgotten. Do you have any ideas for preserving those close family feelings?

Answer. Yes, while it is hard to create the family life of yesteryear which includes long hours of relaxed family time together, there are new ways to create family closeness.

Family Meal

Take the lead from your Thanksgiving experience. As soon as it is over, use that joy and turn it into a family dining schedule that meets your family's needs. You might want yours to be once a month, once a week, or even everyday. In today's day and age there are many families who keep dinner just as it always was—time to gather for the important closeness and support it provides. Some light candles every night to give the meal a festive quality. Others continually change the centerpiece and color scheme of the placemats, table cloth, or dishes. One mom told me that she has a special craft table set up at all times for her preschool and school age children to make table decorations and nightly menus. As you give some thought to your family's dynamics, the old time "family meal," or even one small part of it, may now become a new reality for you.

Family Time

While *breaking bread* together brings out a natural closeness, you can also set up other types of “family time.” If you want your family unit to survive, it needs a life of its own. Going places together is a good start. In addition, nothing can replace the joy and intimacy of shared time at home reading, singing, or talking together. No one way to do this is for everyone. You might want to have one special time before dinner or after when everyone gathers to share a fruit plate, work on separate projects, or collaborate to help each other and create. On the other hand, you might prefer one-on-one and spend individual time with each child separately. Everyday, once a week, or even once a month can make a difference. Your own way is the right way for you and your family.

Family Mission Statement

You cannot get there if you do not know where you are going. Take advantage of the well-known business *mission* model to create a special message that reflects your family’s values. Encourage your children to participate in designing your unique “family mission statement.” As you become more aware of each other’s skills, abilities and talents, your family’s goals and aspirations will become clearer and clearer. Use the “family meal” and “family time” to periodically review and possibly revise your statement.

World Peace

If world peace is on your mind this year, as I suspect it might be, here is an Ancient Chinese Proverb that may serve to light the way.

If there is light in the soul, there is beauty in the person.

If there is beauty in the person, there is harmony in the home.

If there is harmony in the home, there is order in the nation.

If there is order in the nation, there is peace in the world.

-Ancient Chinese Proverb

Remember that family love, time, and attention are what help each and every family member shine. The “family meal, family time,” and a “family mission statement” are all tools you can use to help bring out the best in each other.

Happy thanksgiving to you and your family! Enjoy this very special event as a kickoff to many more meaningful and happy family times together.

Sally Goldberg, Ph.D., is a professor of education at the University of Phoenix and parenting specialist. Through her books, articles, presentations, and one-on-one coaching she empowers parents to solve problems. She gives weekly parenting classes in different locations in Scottsdale, AZ. If you would like to contact Dr. Sally, you can reach her at 480-766-6323 or drsally@drsallyparenting.com. Find out more at www.drsallyparenting.com.

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