



DECEMBER 2007

The traditions of Christmas

Whether it's making rum balls or how you decorate the Christmas tree, family traditions find their way into most people's homes at Christmas time. So what is it about traditions that make them so important to us? Why do our children look forward to them so, so much? Psychologists have studied family rituals and traditions for over 50 years and found that, as we remember traditions, these memories help us recapture feelings of belonging and wellbeing long after Christmas is over. Why? First of all, traditions provide stability. When we do the same traditions year after year it builds trust and security for our families. Regardless of what else may happen, the traditions will not change. So much in our lives these days is temporary. Family traditions provide something for every person to hold onto. If your family moves around, like military families, having traditions gives familiarity in places and houses that are unfamiliar.

Although our Christmas traditions may be similar to our neighbour's, we each have our own way of bringing those traditions to life. That is what's so special. Each family's unique twist is what gives that family its identity - we do this through the food we prepare and decorations we make. Traditions also create a bridge between different generations. We usually have some tradition we grew up with, be it the 'real' Christmas tree or the plum pudding grandma makes. It's these traditions that bring the whole family together.

This may seem obvious, but be sure to choose traditions that are fun and will relieve stress. Sometimes we get caught up in the idea that we need to provide a perfect Christmas for our families. We don't. We need to give them homes that are happy and filled with love and joy.

The idea is to choose activities that are easily reproduced year after year. What's important is not that they be elaborate, but rather that they be repeated.

Merry Christmas!

GET INTO THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT

Prepare a special meal, plum pudding, rum balls or gingerbread house.

- Involve your children in painting ornaments or preparing a simple dessert.
- Give to someone less fortunate. Spend time with a nursing home resident or buy gifts for a lonely neighbour.
- Make a practice of doing something together as a family - driving around to look at Christmas lights and decorations is something everyone will enjoy.