

Let's Talk: Holiday traditions – Making memories

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Hi, my name is Culley Lichtenberg. Let's talk about traditions. You may be asking yourself, what exactly is a tradition and how is it different from other things we celebrate throughout the year? It's something that has meaning behind it from our values and our beliefs. Traditions are very specific in that that's how they are formed and that's how they are celebrated, and also you often have symbols surrounding the traditions, and I'll give you a great example.

Each year at New Year's do you know why they drop the ball in Times Square at midnight? Well, that tradition began back in the 1800s, it was a naval tradition where all the towns on coastal towns they had what they called time balls, and they would drop at one time every day at a very precise time, and all the captains would reset all their navigation.¹ That was a practice and over time, the ball being dropped became associated with an exact time point. And so that's why we drop the ball each year at New Year's.

The benefits of holiday traditions

And there are many benefits to traditions. One in particular is based around the holiday season and traditions are known to alleviate stress for many people. And the reason for this is because traditions are comforting, they are based around positive events and positive emotions. You wouldn't have a tradition based around something that was negative or not pleasant to do. That would be a tradition you would not desire to carry forward. They're beneficial to others because people feel connected to one another and they're comforting, they build a sense of security and you know what to expect. And that's one of the benefits of having traditions around the holiday season.

Traditions also kind of give people a sense of identity and purpose within their group. And so it's a wonderful way to build and strengthen bonds between two people. In fact, they have shown research that says that parents who teach their children traditions have more harmonious holiday events around the time and have more harmonious interactions with their children. And so it's a wonderful bonding experience for both the parent and the child during the holiday season.

And as I say that you might be thinking to yourself, I remember some times over the past few years where it wasn't so harmonious in my home during these traditions and events, perhaps you have a

family member who is very vocal and they have differing opinions from you and things like that, so it's not exactly perfect interactions.

Well, this might bring you some comfort to know, there is a role in psychology called the peak-end rule, and the peak-end rule says that people remember the best moments and then the last moments. So if you're fretting over something you said or what someone else said, chances are they're not holding onto that, what they're holding onto are the best emotions and the best moments of the season and then the last moments, because that's how we capture the memories. Perhaps that's why we come back to traditions every single year because of that.

Share your tradition

So in the spirit of the holidays, I decided to reach out to a couple of team members on the Resources for Living team, and I asked them, what are your family traditions? What do you do over the holidays?

One of them said on Christmas Eve, her and her family members open up one gift and it's a pair of pajamas for each of the family members, and then they all take a photograph together. And it's become such a wonderful thing because they have a wonderful picture from every single year that they can go back and look at and remember the good times.

So, one thing I would encourage you to do this holiday season is to give your own unique contribution to the traditions in your family, because we all have something very unique to offer, something special from each of us, we have special gifts and talents. Bringing your unique contribution to your family gatherings might just transform your traditions with your family for the better and it might be celebrated generations from now. So, don't hold back from putting your stamp on your own traditions.

I want wish you a very happy and safe holiday season this year, and best wishes in the new year.

¹Hassiotis, Christopher, 4 Totally Random Things People Drop on New Year's Eve. How Stuff Works? Accessed December 2021, from <https://people.howstuffworks.com/culture-traditions/national-traditions/5-totally-random-things-people-drop-on-new-years-eve.htm>

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