

The Delicate Art of Creating or Changing Family Rituals

If there is another adult in your immediate family, it is suggested that you talk to him or her first. If not, check out your strategy with an adult friend or family member. Following are suggested guidelines for you to consider when you talk with family members about changing family rituals.

1. Choose a peaceful moment for the discussion.
2. Explain that you would like to discuss a specific family ritual.
3. Express your feelings or needs related to the ritual.
4. Invite the others to share their own feelings, needs, and thoughts about the ritual.
5. Offer your ideas tentatively, rather than definitively.
6. Negotiate a trial run of a new or modified ritual that balances everyone's needs.
7. Agree to follow up to determine how everyone likes the new or modified ritual.

These recommendations are the *direct route* to creating or changing family rituals: specifying needs, values, and concerns; listening; proposing changes; negotiating before trying something out; and evaluating how it works.

A second option is the *indirect route*, which here does not mean manipulative; it means creating an experience before proposing that it become a ritual. The indirect method of initiating or changing rituals has three steps:

1. Make something happen one time without major comment.
2. Ask how others like the new activity and if they would like to make it part of the family's ritual in the future.
3. Negotiate the specifics of the new ritual.

This material, taken from the book, "The Intentional Family", is used with the written consent of the author, William J. Doherty, Ph.D.