

Celebrate Your Family Identity

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On Monday nights when our girls were growing up, Cathy and I would take them to the Golden Spoon for frozen yogurt after dinner. The weekly yogurt run was part of our family identity --- part of what made us who we were. Even the neighbours knew our routine and sometimes shouted to-go orders as we pulled out of our driveway. Our three daughters are now grown, but when our family gets together, we still make trips to the Golden Spoon. It's one of those simple traditions that have kept our family bonds strong.

Not surprisingly, a strong family identity also helps children develop a strong and healthy self-identity. Knowing what makes their family unique --- traditions, values, and ways of relating to one another --- gives children a clear starting point for discovering their own place in the world. Studies have shown that kids who identify with their family's values tend to be less promiscuous and face less risk of drug and alcohol abuse.

I'm a big fan of parents who make the effort to build a strong family identity. But how is it done? Here are three principles that I believe are critical to the process.

1. Be present. Children regard your presence in their lives as a sign of care and connectedness. Families who eat meals together, play together, and build traditions together thrive. Your presence matters! Does your family eat together at least four times a week? If so, there is a greater chance your kids will perform better in school and be less likely to exhibit negative behaviour.
2. Celebrate everything! Don't miss a single chance to celebrate your family. You can celebrate birthdays, graduations, and other rites of passage, but don't miss out on celebrating life's smaller occasions such as Little League victories, learned skills, and school achievements.
3. Talk about faith. For some families, spiritual discussions are easier said than done. But having faith conversations with your kids helps to build your family identity. They also help your kids build strong convictions, as they get older. When you regularly expose your kids to God's truth, it can, as a friend of mine says, "help them develop a sweet tooth for Jesus." And that's something far better than buying your kids frozen yogurt at the Golden Spoon.



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VBS 2019
AUGUST 12 to 16

Starting an Annual Family Meeting

Brett Ullman - Speaker & Author

So what does a Family Meeting look like. It is quite simple. It is a time to talk about anything that people want to talk about. Here are some areas that my family talks about:

- 1 Vacations – are we having one? where will we go? If we are having one we know we will have to be careful with money throughout the year
- 2 Activities – what are the kids going to take part in this year? My daughter is going to take dance lessons and my son is going to do baseball. Both want to ski and snowboard as well
- 3 School – we talk about how the year will look. Both of my kids talked about how they want to get straight A's on their reports card. We talked about how they might go about doing that.
- 4 Chores – we talked about how we need help around the house and have a list of certain things the kids are responsible for (cleaning their own rooms, clearing dishes off the table, emptying the dishwasher etc)
- 5 Meals – Zoe and Ben are going to start cooking 1 meal a week with either Dawn or me.
- 6 Faith – For us we are a family that is going to try and follow living a Christian life. We talked about how we are going to go to church (which service early or late?), Read our Bibles etc
- 7 Camp – my kids want to go to camp again next year so we talked about which weeks this will be.
- 8 Birthday's – are we still having parties? How much will we spend on them? Dawn decided this year that for her present she wants to go to Ripley's Aquarium in Toronto with the family.
- 9 Halloween – Are the kids still going out? If so which costume do they want?
- 10 Spending Freeze – this year we decided to do 1 month spending freeze (after the Keg dinner). No spending on anything except the necessities for 1 month.
- 11 Any purchases we need to do as a family? New bikes, clothes, shoes, different foods?

The goal is that my kids feel that they have a voice in the family. A few years ago we were voting on our family vacation. Dawn, Zoe and Ben voted to go to Mexico. I voted to go anywhere in the world but Mexico. As we landed in Mexico a few months later I think my kids realized that they do have a real say in what we do as a family.

Last year was another major discussion. Do we get a dog? This was on the agenda for the past 3 years. Ben was willing to give up the vacation to get a dog. Our kids needed to understand that getting a dog has lasting impact to the family. Last year we decided that this was something that we were doing to do. Bailey (our English Bulldog) has been with us since November of last year.

There is also a time at the end of the meeting for anyone to bring up anything that is going on that they want to talk about.

Being honest before we started our family meetings I thought it was a really dumb idea. It has ended up being an idea that has had profound implications in our family. It helps us to look strategically and intentionally at who we are as a family and to agree on how we do things as we move forward.

My challenge to you would be to have your own Family Meeting. It does not matter how old or young your kids are it is never to late to start.