

# Catholic Parenting 101

## Embracing Family Rituals

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Family rituals can provide a powerful remedy for the disconnection families often feel due to today's lightning-fast pace of life. Specific rituals intentionally used during times of transition have the unique power to transform chaos into order. Where stress once dominated, family rituals can bring meaning back into family connections.

### Transition Equals Stress

Neurologists remind us that our nervous systems are most prone to stress and emotional liability when transitioning from one activity to another. This is why parents and children are most likely to argue during transition times, such as in the morning while children get ready for school and in the evening when families are preparing for bedtime.

Wise and skillful parents can put this neurological vulnerability to good use by incorporating positive and effective rituals during these periods of transitions when children tend to be most receptive. Consider creating rituals to help children through the three toughest transitions of the day: the morning transition from sleeping to readiness for school, the afternoon transition from school back to home life, and the evening transition from wakefulness back to sleeping.

### Mornings

Creating fun and soothing rituals can help children make the transition from waking up to getting off to school. For example, help your children wake up gradually by gently rubbing their backs, playing their favorite music in the background, and giving them a positive thought to help rouse their tired brain. You might say, "I can just see God smiling now that you are awake!" I often tell my children, "You know, I just have this feeling that something wonderful is going to happen in your life today."



Also, breakfast does not have to mean morning mayhem each day. Turn breakfast into a meaningful ritual simply by setting the table, lighting a candle, and preparing a simple meal. A friend of mine does all of this and then reads a short inspirational story to encourage his family in their life of faith formation.

### After School

Children and teens are in a unique neurological state when they arrive home after school. Tired and hungry, their brains are often quite vulnerable to stress. Which is why this is a great time for kids to connect with a calm and compassionate parent. Many parents report that this is the best time of the day to get teens to open up.

One idea I really like is what my mother-in-law borrowed from her childhood in England. She created a ritual "tea time" every day after school. For fifteen minutes the family would gather around a pot of tea and biscuits, sharing stories from their days at school and work.

## Bedtime

As almost any parent will admit, getting a child to bed is usually a challenge. While this is sometimes due to everyone's sheer exhaustion, it is usually due to the lack of a meaningful bedtime ritual. Commit ten to fifteen minutes to read to your children from a book of their choice. My wife and I used this ritual to read dozens of classic stories and novels that we somehow missed while growing up.

This can also be a good time to snuggle or rub the back of your child as you pray through the experiences and feelings from his or her day. Not only does this help transform bedtime from stressful to soothing, it also introduces your child to the enriching habit of spiritual reflection, noticing how God might be at work in our daily lives.

Today's busy schedules often create unavoidable stress and chaos in our families. However, by simply embracing family rituals during times of transitions, we can all enjoy a rich degree of peace, rhythm, and emotional connection with our children.



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