

New Family Traditions: New Years Resolutions

By Dr. Jenn Berman

January is a time of new beginnings and clean slates. But when we think of New Year's resolutions we tend to think of grown-up commitments to go to the gym, eat healthy, get more organized and be a better person. But the New Year is a great time to assess what is not working for the family unit and make changes that will bring you closer to each other. It is a great time to make commitments to your family and start a new tradition of family New Year's resolutions. Here are a few you might want to consider.

Eat Together.

Commit to having meals together a minimum of five times a week. A study done by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse found that children who had dinner with their families five or more nights a week were far less likely to have tried cigarettes, alcohol and marijuana. Other independent studies have shown that children who eat regular meals with family perform better at school, have better vocabularies, fewer incidences of eating disorders, better nutritional habits, suffer far less from depression and are less likely to attempt suicide.

Have Family Meetings.

Make a commitment to have a regular family meeting on the same day and time every week. These meetings teach kids to speak in a group forum, learn problem solving skills, and let them know that their ideas are valued. Make sure to turn off the phones and put aside the computers during this important family time. Start including your children in these meetings no later than age five and make sure you keep them limited to 20 minutes.

Make One on One Time.

Make sure to have regular "special time" with each of your children. During this time your child gets you to himself. It doesn't have to be elaborate or expensive. It can be as simple as running an errand together or playing hoops. But it should not involve the computer, video games or television. This time together should promote closeness and provide the opportunity to talk.

Reduce Screen Time.

Screen time has been linked to a host of problems for children: ADD, asthma, high blood pressure, poor sleep habits, obesity, vision problems, poor academic performance, depression, reduced creativity, aggression, anxiety, reduced metabolic rate and poor food choices. One of the biggest challenges for today's busy parents is to monitor TV time for their kids. A study by the American Academy of Pediatrics found that children who watch more than 10 hours a week of television show a significant decline in academic performance.

Be Charitable Together.

Start a "Dinner Table Foundation." In the book *The Giving Family* author Susan Crites Price recommends having a regular family meeting to decide where donations will go. Decide in advance how much money will be donated (it does not have to be a large sum). If you have young children let them choose from two or three charities after you have explained to them what each charity does and how the money will be used. For older children, let them come to the table and pitch the charity of their choosing. Work together as a family to decide where the money will go.

Become an Active Family.

Instead of just taking the kids to soccer practice, kick the ball around together in the yard. Plan family activities that require movement so children have a positive association with exercise. Make physical activity a regular part of your family life. Try taking a group walk after dinner, throwing a ball in the backyard, or doing somersaults in the park together. Keep it fun.

Stop the Self Criticism.

A few years ago I was on a television show that examined eating disorders among young children. The little girls, most of whom were between the ages of six and eight and were quite thin, all hated their own bodies. They complained about being "too fat," pinched their thighs in dissatisfaction, and repeated mantras like "carbs are bad." Upon further exploration it was clear that every single girl learned to hate her body from her mother's example. Children, especially girls, look to their mothers to know how to feel about their own bodies. Even if you don't love your body, don't criticize it in front of your child.

New Years is the perfect excuse to make commitments that bring your family closer together.

*Dr. Jenn is a Marriage, Family and Child Therapist in private and the author of two best selling parenting books *SuperBaby: 12 Ways to Give Your Child a Head Start in the First 3 Years* and *The A to Z Guide to Raising Happy, Confident Kids*. Her first children's book *Rockin' Babies* will be released May 2011. Dr. Jenn can be heard every night on Cosmo Radio on Sirius XM. She is also the owner of an eco-friendly clothing line for adults and kids called *Retail Therapy*. For more information go to DoctorJenn.com.*