



FAMILY RITUALS

HOW RITUALS
CAN HELP WITH
TRAUMA
RECOVERY

a guide for first responder families

fortemaustralia.org.au



INTRODUCTION

You probably already have some rituals in place within your household – even if you haven't thought about them before.

Rituals don't have to be huge events. They're usually the little things in your day or week that are simply part of your routine, but which quietly add lots of meaning into your family life.

First responders can experience or witness traumatic events during the course of their work. In fact, more than half of all first responders have experienced trauma at work that deeply affects them.

If you or someone in your family has been through a traumatic event, the whole household can band together to continue or create rituals to help them get back to normal life.

Please note: rituals are one way in which first responders and families can be supported after a trauma, however you should also seek professional help for a full treatment plan.





WHAT ARE FAMILY RITUALS?

Rituals are traditions, habits or behaviours that you regularly do.

Maybe you do some of these rituals by yourself (reading the morning news, for example), some with your family (like eating dinner together), and some with a work or community group (such as a morning tea when it's a colleague's birthday).

Rituals can be formal or informal, and they can be things you do each day, each week, or on special occasions.


Family rituals help you become closer as a family unit, because they show each person that you value spending time together.

WHY ARE FAMILY RITUALS SO IMPORTANT?

Rituals add some predictability into our lives. And our brains feel happy and safe when there's some predictability around us.

They give us a sense of stability, belonging, identity and safety, as well as reinforcing our values. The more we undertake a ritual, the more meaningful it becomes.

Research tells us that rituals can help protect and improve our mental health and wellbeing. They can reduce anxiety. They can also be powerful in supporting children to develop and thrive, and rituals can help maintain unity within families, households and other groups.



**We may take rituals
for granted, but
they often become a
source of comfort
and calm when we
experience loss or
trauma.**

HOW CAN YOU USE RITUALS TO HELP TRAUMA RECOVERY?

When things feel uncomfortable, uncertain or unsafe, as they often do when something traumatic happens, it can be soothing to find some certainty in your life.

That's where rituals come in. The predictability, safety and structure of a ritual can help to settle anxious feelings that can come from trauma or stress.

Getting back to your usual routines and rituals can be very helpful in recovery from trauma. After experiencing a traumatic event, those who return to a routine as soon as possible tend to have improved outcomes.

"Rituals can help to settle anxious feelings that come from trauma or stress."



Rituals are known to help trauma recovery in both adults and children, and communities who together experience hardships (such as natural disasters) also tend to recover best when they collaborate and collectively restore or create community rituals.

WHAT ARE SOME IDEAS FOR FAMILY RITUALS?

- ▶ A morning walk
- ▶ Quiet time to enjoy a coffee and read the news
- ▶ Working in the garden on a weekend morning
- ▶ Sunday morning breakfast together
- ▶ Friday night movie
- ▶ Barbecue on Grand Final Day
- ▶ Summer holidays at the beach
- ▶ Christmas lunch with family
- ▶ Volunteering at the annual community fair
- ▶ Catch-ups with friends on the first weekend of the month
- ▶ School awards nights
- ▶ Memorial services when grieving a loss
- ▶ A bedtime story with your child each night

Have a chat to your family to decide which rituals are important to you, and whether you want to create a few more.



We support first responder families to
proactively look after their wellbeing and
mental fitness

fortemaustralia.org.au

