

# The Importance of a Strong Family Identity

By

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Creating a family identity is an effective way to instill our children with a sense of permanence, belonging, and stability, paving the road for raising confident, independent, moral children. Since the family is our children's first "pack," it's important to do all we can to satisfy that intense pack animal urge to belong – to feel accepted by others.

The stronger that identity is, the more comfortable our children will be in their own skins, because they are a unique part of a strong group – a group that accepts them as they are. This is crucial for their developing faith in their own inner choice-making abilities rather than relying on peer pressure, the media, and other outside influences as guiding beacons. Sadly, children whose families have weak identities often seek guidance from less pristine influences to achieve a sense of belonging that they haven't been able to gain within the confines of their homes.

Any way that we can convey this sense of identity is important. Family traditions and rituals, whether they accompany holidays or not, are something to which our children look forward. Some examples include going on yearly vacations to a specific destination, singing "Happy Birthday" in a special, wacky way, having little family sayings, serving special dishes at holidays, going out on "buddy days" with each child, having father-daughter dinners, mother-son outings, creating special handshakes for each child, and so on. Watching family videos together and having photo albums that chronicle the years of family life handy can provide a strong sense of unity and a few belly laughs to boot.

Family dinners are crucial opportunities to strengthen this sense of identity, because it's a wonderful time for children to freely express themselves as individuals as well as members of the family. However, it must be a completely safe environment free from evaluations, criticisms, or judgments that might hinder this freedom of expression.

We should never denounce what they say and never feel compelled to offer a better idea every time.

A strong family identity also makes the job of instilling values in our children easier. We might try saying things such as, “We don’t tell lies in our family,” or “The Vazquez family shows respect for their friends,” “We use words in our family, not hitting.” This voicing of values demonstrates what we hold dear as a family, but actions pack an even greater punch. For instance, to show my children the benefits of generosity, we enjoy going out on Christmas Eve to distribute blankets, socks, mittens, and jackets to the homeless. To show them the virtues of a strong work ethic as well as the importance of loyalty and responsibility, we volunteer as a family to staff the garage sales and other fundraisers for our schools.

In summary, a strong family identity is like a coat of armor protecting our children from the often cold, harsh world beyond the confines of that white picket fence. It insulates them from those outside influences that would otherwise rob them of their self-esteem, weaken their concept of self, and thwart their attempts to rebound from their mistakes and failures. Most importantly it safeguards them from all that would sabotage the sacred trust they must have in their own inner voice – their ability to inwardly make choices because they are right rather than rely on external beacons to make their choices contingent upon outside approval and acceptance. What a simple strategy. What far-reaching, momentous repercussions for our children, our families, and society as a whole.