

# The intentional family essay sample

[Family](#)



The Intentional Family is a book about strengthening family connections and relationships through everyday rituals, holiday celebrations, special occasions and community involvement. The book serves as a guide to help families transform simple family routines into family rituals. It discusses the importance of being consistent with good family rituals and compromising to change rituals that do not work. Doherty states that family rituals provide four important things, predictability, connections, identity, and a way to enact values. He gives many examples and suggestions on how families can best create rituals from activities they may already be doing. Many families have rituals that they feel “ stuck” with. Doherty also offers suggestions on how to recreate those rituals so they are more enjoyable.

Family rituals involve more than one family member, but not necessarily all members of the family. Doherty breaks rituals into three categories.

Connection rituals involve everyday activities such as family meals, morning and bedtime routines and family outings. Love rituals focus on making individual family members feel special. Love rituals can be divided into couple rituals, such as “ date nights” and anniversaries, and special-person rituals like birthdays, Mother’s Day and Father’s Day. Community rituals include major family events like weddings and funerals. They also include any activity involving a wider social network than just family, giving the family a chance to both gain and give support to friends, neighbors and the community.

Doherty recommends families meals as the best way to start developing family rituals. He is very flexible with his suggestions, recognizing that one way will not work for all families. Doherty encourages families to start taking

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small steps toward creating family rituals at meal time by being more intentional about what time you eat, where family members sit, and how the meal is served.

Because predictability is so important to creating family rituals, Doherty explains the phases of a family ritual in his book. A family ritual has three phases, a transitional phase, an enactment phase and an exit phase. It is important to pay attention to these phases when trying to strengthen or improve your family rituals. The transitional phase of the ritual provides a separation of the ritual from everyday matters. This could be setting the dinner table, lighting a candle, etc. It lets family members know that it's time to focus on one another. The enactment phase takes place during the ritual itself. For example, eating dinner and interacting with family members. The goal of this phase is to enjoy each other's company and reconnect as a family. The exit phase takes place as the family transitions back into their daily activities with less focus on one another. After a meal, a family may decide to wait until everyone is finished eating before they all leave the table.

Aside from family meals, Doherty suggest the easiest way to create family rituals is to start with what you already enjoy doing as a family and then do it more intentionally. This can be going to eat at your favorite restaurant, or going out for ice cream. Not all rituals need to involve spending money; Doherty also gives suggestions of taking a family walk or going fishing. Rituals can also be established around normal daily activities such as children's bed time. For couples, Doherty's recommends going to bed at the same time. This provides an opportunity to reconnect as a couple.

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The most difficult part of establishing rituals, is just that; the establishing of the ritual. Doherty describes three methods of initiating or changing rituals. The direct route involves specifying needs of the family, and listening to family members before proposing changes. The family then negotiates before trying something out and evaluates how it worked. The second method is the indirect route. This occurs when a family member creates an experience before proposing it become a ritual. A third option is to initiate or change rituals through discovery. Once you realize you enjoy something you have already experienced, propose making it a ritual. What Did You Learn?

The most important concept I have learned from reading *The Intentional Family* by William Doherty is that too many people are content to just let life “happen”. Dougherty uses the example of putting a canoe into the Mississippi River. If you do nothing, you will head south. If you want to go another direction or even stay where you are, you have to work hard and have a plan. The same applies to having a family. A couple must plan and work at having a close, connected family. Dougherty suggests this can be accomplished through the intentional planning of family rituals.

Before reading this book, I had not given a lot of thought to family rituals. I recognized that my family had rituals, but didn't understand the impact it can have on relationships. I have learned that family rituals can have a greater effect on families if they are planned to have meaning and significance for the family. There are many examples of activities I have done with my kids that we have enjoyed, but by failing to repeat them, I have missed out on creating a ritual. For an activity to be a meaningful ritual, it needs to be repeated. By repeating these activities, you are increasing the

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predictability or stability children need. Predictability is one of the four important things that family rituals provide. A second benefit of establishing family rituals is the connection the rituals provide for family members. Whether it's reading a bed time story to a child, or making the effort to reconnect with your spouse at bedtime, rituals increase the connection family members have. Rituals also give families a sense of identity. Participating in holiday dinners and family outings gives people a sense of belonging to a family. Rituals can also be used as a way to demonstrate family values. Your family's rituals show whether going to church, volunteering in the community or visiting grandparents are important to you and your family.

I have also realized through reading this book that family rituals do not have to remain the same if they are not enjoyable for the family. Many need fine-tuning if nothing else. A ritual should not be burdensome for any family member. The best example I can think of is my family's holiday meals. My mom is the " coordinator" of all holidays. When asked if she needs help, she will always say no. She then ends up being stressed for weeks before and exhausted the day of. After reading this book, I am better prepared for reshaping this ritual. In the past, I would accept her saying that I shouldn't bring anything or do anything to prepare for the meal. I believe now, that if I explain to her that I would feel more included in the holiday if I was allowed to bring a dish, she would gladly accept my help. It's simply a lack of communication that has prevented us from establishing this. She feels that she doesn't want to burden me with asking for help, then I feel like a burden

to her when I see her exhausted from cooking all day and end up feeling guilty and leaving early.

I have also learned how rituals can eliminate chaos from a busy family. By establishing a daily morning routine and nightly bedtime routine children know what to expect without having to be told by a parent. One of my biggest challenges as a parent is getting my children to do what is expected of them the first time I ask. I get frustrated when I have to ask several times or raise my voice. The hardest part of establishing these rituals is the consistency. After reading the book, I understand how the predictability of the ritual benefits my children, and hopefully I can initiate more meaningful rituals in my family. Knowing that research has been done and it has been found that family rituals are important to holding families together will be my motivation for being more intentional with my own. Highlights of the book

In *The Intentional Family*, Doherty talks about the opposite of an Intentional Family, the Entropic Family. The Entropic Family lacks the attention to rituals and traditions, which slowly fade away over time. Society contributes to the creation of Entropic Families by failing to support families during times of illnesses and child birth. Parents are pressured to rush back to work to earn a paycheck. Our current way of life also prohibits family rituals from occurring by filling our time with busy work schedules, televisions, the internet, etc. We miss out on eating dinner as a family due to children's activities, practices and games. After working all day and running children around all evening, parents are too tired to reconnect with their children over a bedtime story or reconnect with their spouse after the kids go to bed.

Without the intentional planning of these activities and events, these forces pull families away from moments of communicating and bonding.

One of Doherty's goals in this book to help families transform routines or activities into a family ritual. He points out that family rituals give families four important things; predictability, connection, identity and a way to enact values. Knowing that a ritual such as a bedtime story will take place gives the family something to look forward to, if it is not consistent or predictable, then the ritual loses its effect. Rituals of connection should occur between both parents and children, and between couples themselves. For example, couples who go to bed at different times are missing an opportunity to reconnect and may lose connection over time. Family rituals provide a sense of belonging to the family, giving people a special identity as a family member. Rituals also provide a way to demonstrate what a family believes is important and to reinforce family values such as religion, involvement in community, or caring for elder family members.

Doherty classifies rituals into categories according to the function they have. Connection rituals include family meals, bedtime routines, vacations, etc. These rituals give families the opportunity to bond over every day events. Love rituals help to develop intimacy between two family members. Some examples are anniversaries, Mother's Day and Father's Day. These rituals usual occur when two family members spend some one-to-one time and lead to family members feeling special. Events such as weddings and funerals are considered community rituals. The book states that it has been found that the healthiest families give to their community and receive support back.

The Intentional Family not only guides family into establishing rituals, but helps families evaluate their current rituals. Families are encouraged to ask themselves if their current rituals are meeting their family's needs for connection, meaning and community. It helps them identify what areas their family ritualize well and what areas need improvement. Some sample questions a family could ask themselves include: \* Is a ritual missing where you would like one to be?

\* What is the current ritual lacking?

\* Is there too much responsibility placed on one family member? \* Is there an underlying family problem hurting the ritual? In trying to establish new rituals, avoid enforcing changes without discussing why a change might be helpful. Adults should discuss and agree on these changes before acting on them. Children may resist change at first, but a ritual that works well will eventually win the children over. As many family members as possible should be involved with the planning to add meaning to the ritual. Having clear expectations will help eliminate conflict. As family members grow up and family structure changes, rituals may be more difficult to keep intact. Good rituals should be held on to, while being open to change to accommodate a changing family. Most families become used to the way things have always been done in the past. Even if these activities aren't enjoyable, they feel the need to continue them. This can lead to horrible holiday get-togethers where no one is enjoying themselves. By evaluating these activities and becoming more intentional with the planning of them, families can establish family rituals that reconnect them as a family. Things I Didn't Like



From the moment I started reading this book, I couldn't put it down. I have decided that this will be my "go-to gift" for weddings and showers. Not everything in the book was applicable for my family, but I liked the way the author was flexible with his suggestions. I have saved this section of the paper for last, and have struggled to come up with anything that I didn't like about this book. I decided to do some research and try to find things that other people disliked about the book. I have found readers who feel that the first chapter on why being an intentional family is important and last chapter on how to be an intentional family were the only chapters worth reading. While this may be true for families with already established strong family rituals, many rituals can still be improved upon by evaluating what is working and what needs improvement. It is especially valuable for a family who is going through changes such as divorce and need to establish new rituals. Another criticism of the book has been that it didn't include a lot of research material or statistics on how the information was beneficial to clients. Client Benefits

Through the use of everyday rituals, *The Intentional Family* offers ways families can open communication channels between parents and their children, or between husbands and wives. The client may recognize activities they already do as an opportunity to establish family rituals. These can vary from shared family meals and vacations, to regular "storytime," weekly drives, religious services, and monthly "date nights" for spouses. These rituals are important to create more permanent bonds between family members. Most clients are going to experience rituals that may not be enjoyable. Whether that may be celebrating holidays or morning routines

with the children, the book can help manage these daily events and help client establish rituals that reduce conflict and provide an opportunity to reconnect with each other. Clients won't be overwhelmed with this information as the author advises starting small, possibly with making changes to family meal time. While society is pushing families into becoming an entropic family, this book can help counter that by encouraging intentional actions.

### Impact on Developing Counselors

Reading and understanding the concepts discussed in *The Intentional Family* can be very beneficial to a developing counselor. The impact that family members have on one another's mental well being is so substantial that it is vital for a counselor to be knowledgeable on ways to improve those connections and relationships. This book in particular provides a vast amount of information on various types of relationships. It covers couples, families, extended families and families going through divorce. There is information that can apply to a single parent family as well as step parent and step children relationships. Many family issues can be resolved through effective communication and commitment.

*The Intentional Family* offers ways to improve on both of those areas. Creating new bonds or improving upon those are ways for families to improve relationships while going through counseling. Whether counseling parents or children, it is useful for a counselor to understand the impact family rituals or lack of can have on clients. I feel that as a counselor, the book provides an enormous amount of information and insight into how rituals can affect every type of family. I enjoyed reading the first-hand

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account on how different families incorporated family rituals into their family routines, whether they were newlyweds, divorcees, or families dealing with teen-agers. The book provides a resource when dealing with families who are struggling. Doherty states that only an intentional family has a fighting chance to maintain and increase its sense of connection, meaning and community over the years” (Doherty 2002).

#### References:

Doherty, W. J. (2002). *The Intentional Family*. New York: Harper Collins.