



## Building A Sense of Community

In today's world many people don't even know their neighbors, and even those who do know their neighbor may find that they rarely have time for more than a quick wave. In the past, neighbors spent time together and really got to know each other, and children benefited from having other children to play with and other adults to look out for them. While we can't turn back the clock to those simpler times, we can make an effort to turn neighbors into friends and friends into neighbors.

If you don't know your neighbor, take some time to chat. Even a short conversation can help you turn a stranger into a neighbor. If you bake cookies, make some extra for your neighbors. Offer to help with snow shoveling or heavy garden work (and follow through). This gives your child a good role model and a chance to feel a new kind of satisfaction — the kind that doesn't come from getting

things but from giving things.

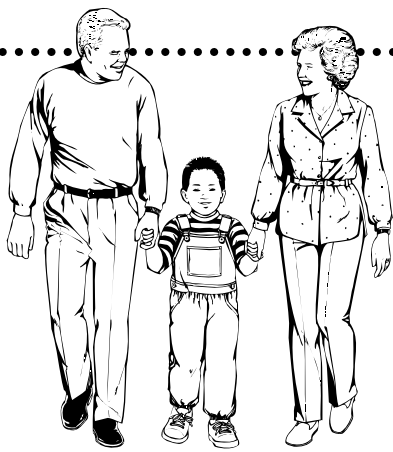


### FAMILY VOLUNTEERING

Have you ever been a volunteer? When most people think of volunteering, they think of an adult or older teen who arranges to help a hospital or senior center once a week. Now there is a new way to volunteer, together as a family. Many organizations that rely on volunteers have recognized that families want to spend their limited free time together and have started to offer a chance to bring the children along. Children gain a great deal from this type of experience: they learn new working skills, they learn to get along with people of different ages, and they feel the satisfaction that comes with helping others.

Volunteering doesn't have to be a long-term commitment — it can be a one-time experience. This works much better for busy families who can fit a day or afternoon once a month into their schedule. This way you can try new volunteer jobs: helping taking care of a park, playing bingo with senior citizens, or preparing meals for AIDS patients and their families.

Your children gain both practical and people skills from all of these experiences. This is the best way to teach the value of caring for others. Check in your local area for the volunteer opportunities nearby or attend a volunteer fair.



## LISTEN TO YOUR CHILDREN

It's easy to become so caught up in our day-to-day struggles that we lose sight of the most important things in life. While we are putting out the "fires" in our lives, our children are growing and changing day by day. If there was one thing that you could do to improve your family immeasurably it would be to spend time every day listening. Real listening demands stopping whatever else you are doing and taking time to listen with both your heart and mind. Children know we are listening when we make sure we are on eye level with them. You can encourage them to talk by not lecturing or interrupting.

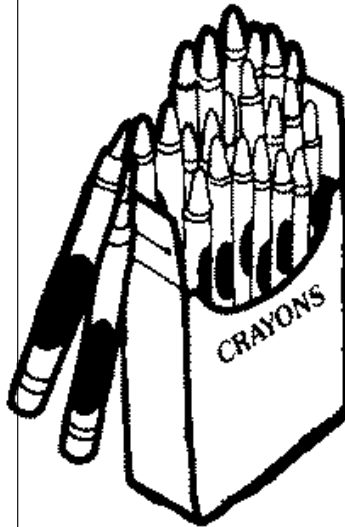
When you are listening, instead of thinking of what you are going to say next, really listen — try to put what your child is saying into your own words. This helps your child know you have heard him. If you misunderstand, it gives him a chance to explain more. You can listen with your heart by putting into words what you think he is feeling: "Sounds like you're disappointed." This way your child feels you understand both his words and his feelings.

This sounds much easier than it is to do. It takes some self-discipline to really listen to our children. But it is worth developing because it is the most powerful way you can form strong relationships within your family.

## BUILDING FAMILY TRADITIONS FOR THE HOLIDAYS

The best thing about family traditions is that children come to look forward to them so much. Remember, the best family traditions are simple ones.

- Wrap your family presents in brown paper and then have the children decorate the wrapping paper with drawings. It adds a personal touch.

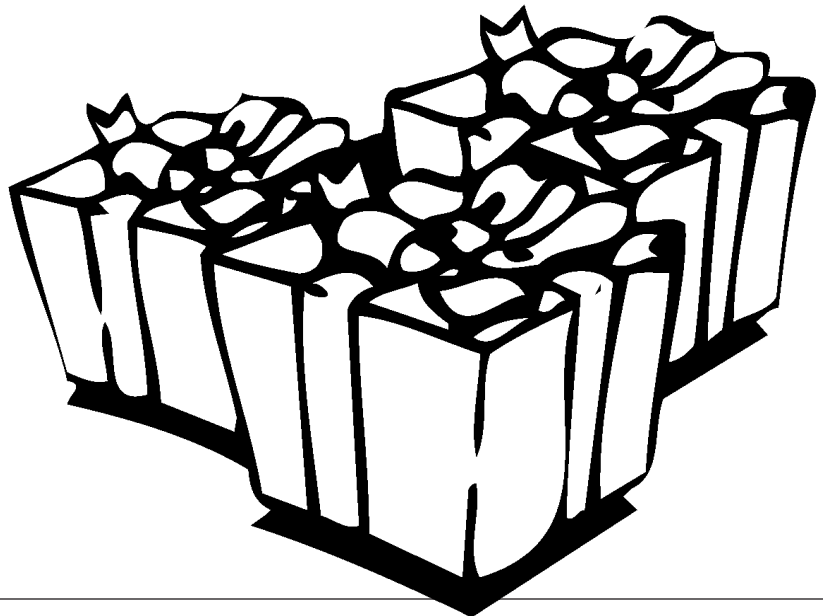


- Read a favorite story as part of your holiday celebrations. Re-read that story every year at that time.

- Make going for a walk together a part of your family traditions. You can add it to your holiday celebration. A walk after the holiday meal can be a simple way to enjoy the holiday together. Or try a sunrise walk to celebrate a special day.

- During holidays invite neighbors and friends who would be on their own to share holiday meals and fellowship.

- Often holidays involve fancy meals that take a lot of work. To cut down on the work for the rest of the holiday season, offer a snack-type supper: Cut up veggies, cheese, and apples to serve with crackers, popcorn, or anything that is simple to prepare. You can also have this meal picnic-style on a blanket in the living room. This change can help relax the cook, and children love to have a meal in a different place.



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