



Creating Family Traditions & Building New Memories


Christmas means long car rides to multiple houses, cranky kids, and celebrating with both sides of the family. At least it did with my family growing up. It's possible we celebrated at home a few holiday season in my 18 years, but my memory banks are heavily stocked with recollections of cramped quarters and marathon yuletide celebrations.

Jared and I married in September 2008, which meant the holiday season beckoned right around the corner from our autumn wedding day. At that point, we still lived in California, a 30-minute drive from my parent's house and much of my extended family. His grandma also lived in close proximity, and his parents were a day's drive away in Oregon. That December we had a choice to make about our inaugural Christmas holiday. We decided to celebrate as a family. Just the two of us.

Now mind you, I still couldn't cook beyond boxed meals and sandwiches, so we slept late, opened gifts, took in a movie, and found a Chinese restaurant for our first glorious Christmas dinner.

Our loved ones graciously understood our RSVP regrets, but I'm sure there were some hurt feelings. We love our families and have many fond memories of holiday celebrations together, but it was important to us to establish a new tradition as a new family unit of two. The tradition of *our traditions*.

Over the years Jared and I have talked about memories from our childhoods and the fondness we feel for different activities. We then find ways to apply those same events, or rework the essence they carry, into celebrations that fit well with our family unit. One of the most rewarding aspects of family life as an adult is the opportunity to build happy memories together. These habits may center around holidays or birthdays, or unique commemorations for report cards or lost teeth. Jared and I found that we default to upholding or expecting the same traditions of our childhood, often without realizing *why* we do so, or communicating that need to



each other. This proves problematic at times, because we grew up in different homes with different holiday institutions.

We've developed ways to talk through our preferences in advance and adapt our own versions of holiday traditions, especially catered to our current stage of life and who we are as a family. You can use the following worksheet—printing multiple copies as needed—to help you work through a similar process, uncovering why certain traditions are important to you and how to carry those same happy memories into your new family dynamic in positive ways.

For example ...

Holiday or Celebration	<i>Christmas</i>
Tradition	<i>Growing up, my parents always told us that Santa wasn't real, so the North Pole aspects of the holiday were never part of our family tradition.</i>
Favorite memory with this tradition	<i>I loved doing advent with aspects of Jesus's birthday story and having a birthday party for Jesus in December. As a know-it-all kid, I also loved telling my classmates that Santa wasn't real and that their parents were lying to them. (Sorry elementary school friends.)</i>

Why I treasure it or why I don't	<i>My parents never wanted us to doubt if we could trust what they said and wanted the Christmas season to be Christ-focused. I didn't like it because it seemed like the Santa thing was so much fun. In hindsight, the holidays seemed more magical for other kids.</i>						
The Parts I Love Most Are ...	<p>Circle all that apply</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>The Activity Itself</td> <td>The Memory of a Past Event</td> <td>The Memory of a Loved One</td> </tr> <tr> <td>That We're Doing It Together</td> <td>That My Kids Enjoy It</td> <td>That My Spouse Enjoys It</td> </tr> </table> <p>Other: <i>I realize that I love the Jesus focus but don't really like that other kids seem to have more fun. There has to be a harmless way to include more fun in our own family traditions.</i></p>	The Activity Itself	The Memory of a Past Event	The Memory of a Loved One	That We're Doing It Together	That My Kids Enjoy It	That My Spouse Enjoys It
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How we've applied this tradition to our family	<i>Our son isn't old enough yet to understand.</i>						
How my husband feels about this tradition	<i>He didn't grow up with Santa either but thought it would be fun to incorporate it somehow with our kids.</i>						
How my kids feel about this tradition	<i>NA.</i>						



Based on the details above, the most appropriate application of this tradition to my family right now is to	<p>Circle which answer applies.</p> <p>A. Keep it just as I remember it. B. Rework it. C. Skip this one, it's not a great fit.</p>
If you chose Answer B Brainstorm some ways to keep the essence of this tradition and reimagine it for your family. Ask your loved ones for input!	<p><i>Dillon isn't old enough yet, but we've decided to include the North Pole fun in our Christmas. We'll still talk about how we celebrate Jesus's birth, but we'll also do elf on the shelf—if that's still a thing in a few years. We're modifying the Santa tradition in that we'll tell our kids he's not real, but that it's fun to imagine and we can play pretend to enjoy all of the Santa-related songs, activities, and a bonus present.</i></p>

Now you try! There's no right or wrong answers. You're just in a process of uncovering what traditions fit your family best for who you are, where you are, and what you're about in this season.



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