

Rituals

In the midst of uncertainty and disruption, rituals can remind us of stability and security. Whether you already have structure to your day, or if you are experiencing a big change in routine, remembering or creating rituals can help build a sense of strength and order for you and those who may be around you.

Rituals and routines are an important aspect of day-to-day well-being. Rituals and routines are behaviors, gestures and practices that are performed with regularity and sometimes with ceremony. They signal transitions between activities and states of being, and can be experienced at many levels, including the individual, family, relationship, collective, organizational, community and cultural. Rituals may mark milestones or simply be a way to put a bit more awe and joy into your daily round. Some people create rituals as a way to help manage difficult or traumatic experiences. Rituals can be formal or informal, public or private and can be very simple or very complex. Some rituals are part of spiritual (“ritual” is encompassed in the word “spiritual”) or religious practices, which are an example of formal rituals. Informal rituals are things like having a usual practice related to taking your dog for a walk when you get home or having pancakes for breakfast on the weekend. You may have many rituals and routines built into your life that you haven’t considered as rituals up until now. Today presents a wonderful opportunity to explore the rituals you already have and perhaps to create new ones.

Practice: Think about your typical day or week and write down any rituals or routines that you identify in the pattern of your life. Include even the very simple things like when and how you wake up to how you eat your meals and how you like to prepare for sleep.

We often participate in rituals and routines in times of change, celebration, and loss. Sometimes rituals can help us mark the passing of time and the way things change. For example, we often celebrate birthdays and anniversaries as a way of commemorating the time and maturation of a person’s life or relationship. We often mark a new job or a retirement with celebration and ritual, observing a new part of the individual’s career path. The loss of a loved one through death, divorce, or other form of separation is often a time for pausing to reflect on the meaning of the person or relationship. These rituals help us connect with and comfort one another. In disrupted times, rituals become an important way for us to connect with ourselves and others. Sometimes there are no formal or widely-recognized ways of marking a change or loss, which can contribute to a sense of isolation and uncertainty. The current COVID-19 situation means loss of “normal” routines and ways of life for a while. In many ways, this loss is hard to even understand or grasp as it is happening. And it is a loss that often has no formal way of being recognized, so those involved are left without rituals to mark the experience. As we begin to understand what this situation means for us individually and collectively, it may help us to create rituals of connection and commemoration.

On a personal level, it can be helpful to insert new rituals or bring a more reverent and perhaps grateful awareness to everyday happenings. Sometimes rituals can be used as a way to bring honor and appreciation to tasks we might otherwise consider mundane. For example, you might create small, simple daily rituals around:



- Waking
- Morning beverage
- Exercise
- Meals
- Communication: conversations, texts, emails, social, phone calls
- Lighting candles
- Washing hands
- Washing dishes, sweeping the floor, washing windows
- Mundane tasks
- Taking care of children, pets, plants
- Before and after a big project or deadline
- Accomplishments or failures
- Grocery shopping
- Taking out the trash
- Reading/writing
- Signing on and off accounts
- End of the day
- Turning off electronics
- Opening and closing the window shades
- Fastening/unfastening seatbelt
- Showering/bathing
- More seasonal rituals might include
 - Planting seeds or seedlings during the early growing season
 - Finding seasonal produce to enjoy
 - Celebrating holidays that are meaningful to you
 - Connecting with nature as the seasons shift
 - Noticing when you wear certain clothes to reflect the season
 - Enjoying music, art or activities that reflect the season or holiday
 - Reading novels, poems and children's books that commemorate the season
 - Using spices and recipes that celebrate the season

Practice: What rituals might help you bring a more intentional awareness to your life? Do you currently have rituals you would like to strengthen? Are there rituals in your life you would like to stop doing? How do rituals contribute to your overall sense of well-being? What rituals do you miss?

Rituals can help us anchor into a sense of centeredness and stability in times of uncertainty. They can help us bring some order and discipline to the way we go about our days, months and years. Rituals and ceremony have been an important part of human existence for as far back as we can imagine. Attention to the passing of time and experience can help us bring meaning to our life and others'.

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