

Shabbat Schmooze At the Nursery School



- **Creating Shabbat Traditions in Your Home**
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Questions and Ideas for Parents:

1. What are some family traditions from your childhood? Share a memory with your child (ren) of something you remember doing regularly with your family.
2. Does your family currently celebrate Shabbat at home? Is there anything you would like to add to your Shabbat ritual practice?
3. Have your parents or grandparents told you stories of their family Shabbat celebrations?

In the beloved screenplay and movie *Fiddler on the Roof*, a fiddler stands on the rooftop of a cottage in a small *shtetl* (a small Jewish village) somewhere in the heart of Russia. The musician fiddles while Tevya sings a heartfelt version of the first song, "Tradition." One might wonder why the lyricist felt the need to write an opening song that includes a chorus with one word boldly repeated six times. When we hear this song, our tradition reminds us of the importance of Shabbat.

In *Parashah Yitro* we are presented with arguably the most important Jewish tradition that we honor to this day. In this chapter of the Torah, Moses receives the Ten Commandments. The fourth commandment instructs us to "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy." In the Torah, our first encounter with Shabbat is in the very first *parashah*, *B'reishit*. We learn that God created the world in six days, then rested on the seventh day, blessed that day and declared it holy. And so we are commanded to cease from work, with God's "rest" as our own model. As with everything in creation, there is wisdom behind this concept of resting on the seventh day.

We know from Tevya and perhaps from personal experience that tradition is important in the history of a family and of a people, but it is also extremely important in the everyday lives of young children. *Parenting* magazine writer Marian Edelman Borden reminds us that "Traditions are the always in life, the rituals and customs that build common memories for children, offer comfort and stability in good times and in bad, and create a sense of family identity." There is a story told of a young girl who was given a picture of three objects: a glass of grape juice, a dress and a sandwich.

She was asked to circle the two objects that had something in common. You might think she would circle the juice and the sandwich, but she chose otherwise. She circled the juice and the dress! When asked why she made this choice, she explained that dresses are for special occasions like Shabbat. Because of her family's regular Friday night Shabbat dinner, complete with ritual blessings (including the blessing said over the wine), the little girl circled the dress and the juice. Obviously, this weekly experience of Shabbat was deeply embedded in her consciousness, a wellspring from which she can draw security, safety, and predictability—exactly what a young child needs. We are fortunate to have inherited the mandate to remember the weekly tradition of Shabbat both for its richness and beauty and for the fact that it gives us another way to provide stability and identity for our children in a world that is always changing. The text of this *parashah* does not give us the "how to" for celebrating Shabbat; the "how to" are the details, not the core of the message. It is our history and creativity that allow us to "remember" Shabbat and to keep it holy, both the traditions we may inherit and the new traditions that we establish in our families. As parents, you can create a tradition of family rituals that will help you and your children experience the magic of tradition and the magic of Shabbat. You may already be celebrating Shabbat in your home. Maybe there is something you have been thinking of adding to that practice. If not, you can start now. Begin with one or more rituals that flow with your family life and honor some aspect of the nature of Shabbat. Maybe Friday becomes pizza night and this becomes your family's ritual Shabbat dinner. By lighting the candles and saying the blessing before taking the first bite of pizza, you will mark the moment and make a centuries old connection that will give you and your children an opportunity to welcome Shabbat in a more memorable way. Or every Saturday, either in the morning or afternoon, set aside a block of time for a family read-aloud session that becomes your family's ritual Shabbat Saturday experience.

It is not important that you create the perfect rituals; instead, let them evolve naturally, an extension of what your family enjoys. It is not so much what you do that is important; rather it is the fact that you established family rituals that will become traditions. These rituals will provide time and space for you and your children to be together as a family and they will help your children internalize the idea that Shabbat is special.

We once heard noted Early Childhood Educator Bev Bos speak about the importance of tradition and ritual. She believes that every child should be able to finish positively the following sentence: "In my family, *we always* _____." By creating and regularly repeating Jewish rituals that belong to your family, you will lay a foundation for your child that offers security, stability, a sense of belonging and connectedness, and pride in his or her family. You will give your children a suitcase full of memories that will allow them to say "In my family on Shabbat, we always _____." Fill in the blank! Make it your own!