Rituals are important for families as well

You may often hear Dr Peter Miller talk about the importance of school rituals. As we were nearing the end of the school year, we were involved in two of the most important for All Saints’ College - the Carols Service and Presentation Day. A ritual is an activity performed in a special place, often at a special time to influence those taking part. Rituals may be described as the traditions of a community, including a school. Rituals are characterised by formalism, traditionalism, invariance, rule-governance, symbolism and performance. Our school, like many others, prides itself on its many rituals ranging from the two already mentioned to such events as Valedictory Dinners, Assemblies, Remembrance Day and the Benefactors’ Service. But families have rituals as well.

Family rituals are things that only your family does. They help to give a sense of identity and help build family ties. They do not need to be elaborate, fancy or even religious; they just need to be meaningful. Often families develop rituals for birthdays, mealtimes, bedtimes, weekends and events like Christmas and Australia Day. Sometimes, they may be things that only your family may understand like inside jokes, nicknames, or could be a restaurant you go to once a month, unusual food combinations, your own rules for backyard cricket, or a song before bed, that can hold special meanings for families. If you really think about it, you probably have dozens.

Rituals can strengthen a family’s values and can add to children’s feelings of security and predictability.

In today’s busy world, families face many pressures that make it difficult to be simply just a family and to strengthen family bonds. So if you are looking for things to do, activities that can enhance a sense of belonging, why not do the following: you may actually be doing some of these activities now!

* Cook dinner together, and more importantly, eat it together without the TV on.
* Family DVD night - rent a movie, order a pizza, take turns to pick the title.
* A family “playlist”. Create your own family playlist so you can be “plugged in together”. You will get used to Justin Bieber!
* Flip through an old family photo album or watch a vintage family video. A chance for some fond memories.
* Visit Nana in the nursing home as a family.
* Go bowling together. Ten pin, bowls or even golf.
* Play board games - cards, dominoes and so on. You must have an old Monopoly game.

There is an invitation in all of this to take stock of how your rituals are working for your family right now. What is working, what is not? That in itself might open up a great family conversation. Open communications is what keeps rituals and families healthy.

On a final ritualistic note, have a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.