

## GIVING BACK IS A FAMILY AFFAIR

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Give back to the community as a family by volunteering at a food bank. Photo source: WE archives.

Most holidays come with ready-made traditions—some important, some frivolous. Canada Day is for barbecuing and fireworks, and Thanksgiving is for expressing gratitude for our bountiful lives (while devouring a big bird).

Seven Canadian provinces have established a holiday in February to break up the bleak winter months with another long weekend. Four of them—Alberta, B.C., Manitoba and Ontario—have dedicated their winter holiday to families.

However, Family Day is thus far a holiday without a tradition. That's a shame because traditions are an important part of family life. Maintaining traditions makes families stronger and more stable, and gives children a feeling of comfort and security, [according to Dr. Susan Coady](#), a researcher in family relations at Ohio State University.

But what to do when the weather is gloomy and you and your credit card are still coming down from the last holiday? Rather than retreat into separate rooms in the February darkness or risk it becoming just another greeting card holiday, let's imbue this unclaimed occasion with a tradition of giving. Not giving gifts, but giving back as a family to our communities.

Here are some ideas to help you launch a Family Day giving tradition:

**Make 'giving plates.'** This bake-and-take activity is sure to become a family favourite. Decorate some inexpensive ceramic plates with food-safe paints. Have a family baking session to fill the plate with goodies. Finally, share your gift with new or isolated neighbours, sick or stressed friends, or even the mail carrier or bus driver.

**Empty-the-closets day.** Ransack the family wardrobes for old, unwanted apparel. Bag it up and make a family trip to the local Salvation Army or Goodwill store to donate your duds. Why not bring some of the leftover home-made treats for the hard-working volunteers there, as well?

**Family film night.** Fire up the popcorn maker and park the family in front of Netflix. Instead of the latest *Star Wars* installment, choose a film with a social message like *The Help*. Afterwards, discuss the issues in the film, how the characters took action and what actions the family can take for a related cause.

**Take Dollars and Sense** Plan your family budget for the year with your children. We're not suggesting you let your teen balance your accounts, but financial literacy helps kids feel empowered, and gets them thinking

about how much it takes to run a household. Set aside some funds for great family experiences—like a trip—but also for a charitable commitment. Encourage your kids to do the same by donating birthday money or a portion of their allowance. Help them with research, but let them pick the cause they care about.

**Red letter day.** Every Family Day, pick a cause to write about. Compose a joint letter—or, if kids are older, individual letters—to take action on the issue. Maybe it's writing to your Member of Parliament about climate change, or supporting an Amnesty International campaign to free political prisoners.

Use this generic holiday to start a meaningful tradition. Because the family that gives together, stays together.