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Ideas for Intergenerational Living

*a series of articles devoted to promoting cooperation
and exchange between the generations*

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Kits, Calendars and Other Ideas for Nurturing Family Connections

The New Year always brings ambitious resolutions and good intentions to spend more time with family. Especially in the post-9/11 environment, our connections with family and friends are increasingly precious – but as difficult to maintain as ever. Here are some practical ideas for nourishing and strengthening those valuable relationships.

If your family is like mine, during get-togethers, it's just a matter of time before somebody turns on a movie and the discussion trickles off. If this rings true in your family, try “movie kits” as a way to spice up your next family movie-time.

A movie kit is a large bag of items that relate to a scene or theme from a movie you're watching together. It really doesn't matter what the movie is or what the items look like. The idea is simply to transform movie-watching from a passive, individualistic activity to an active, shared activity.

For example, for the movie *Men in Black*, you can pass around a bag filled with black items – ties, hats, gloves, socks, belt, wigs, etc. – before the movie begins. Halfway through the movie, call “swap” and watch everyone clamor for the most provocative items.

If you're watching *Miracle on 34th St.* or one of the more recent Santa Claus movies, a movie kit might contain the traditional Santa Claus paraphernalia – white beards and Santa hats – as well as postcards addressed to the North Pole and pencils so that, during intermission, everyone can write a card to Santa. After they are written, share them with each other for extra laughs. For families with young children who like to see the same movie many times, movie kits might be the saving grace.

You also can use family traditions as opportunities for emphasizing cross-generational connections. One idea is to create custom-made calendars, with photos of family members or objects around the house that have been in the family for a long time. This latter theme can be played out in many ways, if you live in a home that's been in the family for generations. Consider using images that represent milestones to which family members can relate, such as the markings on a wall used to measure children's heights as they grew up, or toys that adults played with as children. For extra impact, add a witty saying, such as “Always remember where you came from.”

If the family's roots are tied in with farming, consider adorning each month of the calendar with images from the family farm; this might include farm implements, scenes of the surrounding land, the squeaky gate, or even the country store.

Another idea is to cut up a clothesline, clip each piece to an item of clothing from each family's member's childhood, and mount them onto some sort of backboard. For extra effect, add some sort of saying, such as: "Next time your kids complain, tell them, 'Think you had it tough? We washed our clothes by hand' ..."

Other projects that symbolize family unity:

- Pressing flowers, buds, leaves, or fruit from the tree that family members planted together.
- Collecting replicas of some household item which represents family togetherness – e.g., the radio that family members huddled around for favorite programs, the pie plates that grandma used to bake her famous apple pie, and everyone's favorite little red wagon.

Such activities not only serve as reminders of a family's unique history, but they also send a message that the family is still connected and the continuum of caring is still intact. One additional good thing about such items is that they may be incredibly easy to get – no more trouble than a visit to the attic.

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