

# Rituals and Routines

**Routine:** *a usual set of activities or way of doing things*

**Ritual:** *a ceremonial act or action (not necessarily religious or spiritual)*

## Living in Suspension

Contrary to how it may seem, Canadian culture is steeped in ritual. From graduations and proms to weddings and funerals, from Sunday dinner and weekend bonfires to holiday traditions and birthday celebrations. These may not seem like ritual, because they are so normal to us, but underneath it all there is ceremony, the ceremony of life transitions, of marking the passage of time, and of intentional connection with loved ones.

We do not realize how many routines and rituals fill our lives until they are suddenly halted. The big rituals like weddings are more noticeable in their absence, but we may not notice when the lack of a morning drive to work or lunch hour walk really start to impact us.

The lack of these rituals and routines place us in a state of limbo, living neither here nor there, stuck in a holding pattern, waiting to see when we will find a new sense of normalcy, and what that sense of normalcy will even look like.

## The Beauty in Small Ritual

The difference between routine and ritual is that a routine is something we do without thought, like waking up at a certain time or getting changed after work before making supper, and ritual is something that we do with mindful intention, like keeping a gratitude journal or sitting outside at lunch to reset our brains for the afternoon. Rituals may become routine, but they do still remain distinct.

Incorporating small rituals into our routines creates little moments of mindfulness and attention in our day, moments that would otherwise pass by unconsciously. This can be as simple as adding a face massage into our morning or evening face washing routine, or it can be adding a new activity to our routine like pulling a daily tarot or oracle card and meditating on our intentions for the day. Things like brewing our coffee manually, with a French press or pour over, allow us to engage with this otherwise mindless routine and turn it into a ritual for starting a new day. Adding essential oils (carefully!) to the shower can add a mindful sensory experience, while choosing a pleasant scent to rub on to our wrists can spread that pleasant experience throughout the day.

*There is no right or wrong way to create a ritual, only the way that feels best to you.*

## Finding New Ways to Mark Time

The biggest impact of losing routines and rituals is that hours, days, weeks, and months bleed together. You look up and wonder where the last season went, feeling like the last month both flew by and dragged at the same time. It was already well researched before the pandemic that keeping routines helps with many different types of mental illness, now we know that it also helps to smooth over the struggle of massive change. Adding rituals to the mix

helps us create meaning and intention in our days, setting waypoints on this new path we all walk.

The best way to mindfully create routines and rituals is to break down the different types by time periods (day, week, month, year):

### **Day**

- getting dressed for the day even if you aren't going anywhere
- setting aside dedicated time to drink your morning beverage in quiet
- getting up a few minutes earlier to stretch or meditate before you start the day
- putting on comfy clothes around dinner as if you were getting home and changing out of your work clothes
- buying hygiene products that smell nice and allow you to feel a bit more pampered
- creating a daily journaling time
- designating a family meal where everyone gathers, it doesn't have to be dinner

### **Week**

- watching a movie or having a bonfire on a Friday night to welcome the weekend (or whatever day of the week comes before days off)
- Sunday dinner (or whatever day comes before your work week) where the family cooks together
- setting up a Zoom coffee date with friends once a week (or every two weeks)
- choosing a day to clean and reset your living space for the new week

### **Month**

- monthly is a good time period for trying new things or going out of your way to create a more special experience, it's unrealistic to try and do these things weekly and can add to stress instead of relieving it
- make a point to do a big activity once a month, like finding a new place to hike, ordering take out from a new restaurant, or exploring somewhere you've never been
- send an email to relatives that updates them on your life, attach pictures
- try a new recipe, whether cooking or baking

### **Yearly**

- make a point of having Zoom celebrations for birthdays and holidays, send out recipes so that everyone eats the same meal or makes the same drink, plan a fun outfit theme
- try out new holiday traditions with just your household, sometimes there's even bigger joy in the small, quiet, intimate moments
- mark the change of seasons by doing a seasonal activity, like planting a garden in the spring, the first bonfire or swim of the summer, driving around as the leaves change colours or making autumn leaf crafts, and standing outside during the first snow or making a hot chocolate and turning on the fireplace channel
- take your vacation time, even if you aren't travelling, and plan something special during that time (or make sure your household coordinates the vacation to spend time together)