

to provide carrots for Santa Claus's reindeer, continuing this pattern into adulthood became a way for the family to reflect their unique family culture that valued togetherness and fun. These days, the family shares all sorts of crazy pictures of Carrot Time on social media for extended family and friends to see.

Carrot Time is one example of how a family creates and enacts a relational culture. As they communicate, family members create **relational culture**, which we defined in Chapter 1 as a shared set of meanings, expectations, and rules for interaction that contributes to creating a relatively unique communication system.² Some families hide eggs on Easter, say a family prayer in German before each Sunday dinner, or use certain nicknames for one another that no one outside of the family knows. Such practices represent a culture high on humor and togetherness. Conversely, some families find holidays to be frivolous and unnecessary, instead using that holiday time to get caught up on tax preparation, sleep late, plant spring flowers, or do research for a term paper. Every family system interacts and creates its own worldview, which reflects members' shared beliefs and meanings, and undergirds the family's communication patterns, which we discussed in Chapter 2. Family members may or may not identify equally with that worldview, however. Nevertheless, relational cultures emerge from ongoing communication patterns as members of the family system interact and build, maintain, alter, and sometimes dissolve their relational culture with long-lasting effects.

Consider partners' behaviors as they develop a family system. Each must undergo a process of mutual accommodation by developing a set of **transactional patterns**, which are ways in which each member of the family triggers and monitors the behavior of the other and is, in turn, influenced by the previous behavioral sequence. According to family therapist Salvador Minuchin, these patterns form "an invisible web of complementary demands that regulate many family situations."³ The communication patterns in a family system are redundant in that they help regulate the behaviors and expectations of what to expect and are altered based on feedback.⁴ You may not be very aware of transactional patterns on a daily basis as they likely operate smoothly and mostly outside of your awareness. For example, you may come to expect that your family does not often talk about what is bothering them. Members of dyadic and family systems negotiate a set of common meanings as they interact over time and this system grows as family members are added. This negotiation process is both subtle and complex. The following example exemplifies marital partners and parents who have succeeded in creating a system of communication patterns that work well for them:

My parents see each other as intelligent, attractive, loving, and genuine. Neither responds well when it is obvious that the other partner is avoiding conflict. They openly discuss problems relating to their personal relationship, inner feelings, and children because they desire to grow together through the good times and the bad times. My parents are a highly interdependent couple; they value being together and