On Friday night after you light Shabbat candles, we invite you to add or adapt the custom of blessing your children. You could also broaden the tradition and bless the adults sharing your Shabbat meal.

As we enter the sacred time of Shabbat, these blessings offer a moment to express appreciation to our loved ones that we may not have time to voice during the busy workweek.

Marcia Falk’s adaptation of the blessing, inside, brings our contemporary sensibility to a traditional Jewish custom. Free of constricting gender roles, it empowers us and our children with a sense of possibility.

On the back you’ll find a variety of voices with customs for blessing children and adults. We hope these personal traditions will give you ideas of how to incorporate the blessing of children and adults into your Friday night ritual.

This card is part of Kolot’s series of “new traditions” – blessings that are rooted in tradition and meet the needs of contemporary Jews. Please visit the resources section of www.kolot.org, as well as www.ritualwell.org.
Marcia Falk is perhaps the most important and innovative liturgist working today. In her commentary on the Blessing of the Children she writes:

“The custom of blessing one’s children on the eve of the Sabbath and holidays is an especially poignant Jewish ritual, but the content of the traditional blessing is rather puzzling. … [I]t asks God to make the boy like Ephraim and Menasheh; an adaptation for girls asks that they be like the foremothers Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah.

“Why Ephraim and Menashe, one cannot help but wonder – indeed why any particular ancestors at all? In its specificity, this blessing seems restrictive rather than expansive; it doesn’t open out to the range of possibility and promise that ought to characterize youth.”

Traditionally, parents place their hands on their children’s heads and bless them silently or out loud.

_______________________________

(the child’s name)

Be who you are —
and may you be blessed
in all that you are.
לבח: __________________ ,
(שם הילדה)

החי אששרה חיה —
והחי ברוך
באשר חיה.

To a girl: __________________ ,
(the child’s name)

Hayi asher tihyi —
vahayi beruḥah
ba’asher tihyi.

לבח: __________________ ,
(שם הילדה)

החי אששרה חיה —
והחי ברוך
באשר חיה.

To a boy: __________________ ,
(the child’s name)

Heyeyh asher tiyeh —
veheyeyh baruḥ
ba’asher tiyeh.
My family modified the traditional blessing to be more inclusive by age and gender. I bless my partner, who blesses our six-year-old daughter, who blesses her 16-month-old brother, who kisses the keppi (head) of his teddy bear. As our Shabbat table changes, so does the order of blessings, except that the teddy bear always gets the kiss on the keppi.

— Catherine Sull

Instead of saying the traditional “eyshet hayil” (woman of valor), my husband and I reflect on the week and speak appreciations to each other. If any of our children are present, we speak appreciations to them, and bless them. The children then speak appreciations from the week and bless us as well.

— Rabbi Goldie Milgram

Richard and I have always followed the practice of blessing our children on Friday night, but never did anything ritually to recognize each other. Now, following hand-washing (before which we remove our wedding bands), we each replace the other’s ring, creating a moment each week reminiscent of our time under the huppah.

— Barbara Hirsh

The traditional Shabbat blessing of children finishes with the priestly benediction that ends “May God’s face turn to you and give you peace.” In our family we add, “and may you witness the spread of peace throughout Israel and the world.”

— Rabbi Yonatan Gordis