



Soulful Home

Finding the Sacred in
Our Everyday Spaces

June 2020 - Compassion

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The Welcome Mat

What Does it Mean to be a Family of Compassion?

This month, we're sharing a powerful story: the wisdom tale about the fox and the lion. We don't want to spoil the surprise ending, but one thing we like about it is that it's both humbling and empowering at the same time. That's one of compassion's gifts to us. When we open our hearts to feel the suffering of others, it hurts, but then we regain our sense of self-differentiation and we realize that we--in that moment--are not experiencing the same kind of suffering as another, and so, we could be in a position to help.

Many people have remarked that the pandemic has brought out the very best helpers in all of us. The Internet is full of news about neighbors helping neighbors, strangers helping strangers, health care and essential workers helping so, so many sick, hungry, needy people. We don't have to look far to find inspiring stories of people around the world being moved by compassion to be their best selves.

And, we reach deep to find compassion for ourselves, too, when our best selves are just not available, when we have a little sliver of energy or health or wellbeing enough to make it to the next moment. The pandemic is not affecting all people equally, and we were not equally privileged to begin with. So while the stories of others' acts of compassion are deeply stirring and beautiful, grace and self-love remind us that wherever we are today, right now, is OK, and tomorrow might be different.

In this, our last packet for the 2019-2020 school and church year, we're signing off with a few familiar favorites and a few new twists. Because it may still not be safe to go exploring around your neighborhood, we've borrowed UU religious educator Kimberly Sweeney's Magical Mail idea to create connections near and far. Our conversation starters in the At the Table section invite thoughts of a more reflective nature, befitting the shift into a new stage of our society's emergency responses. Our On the Porch resource is a deep-dive with NPR's Krista Tippett into the notion of compassion, thought-provoking and spiritually challenging material to ponder together with those you love and trust. Dig deep, find your bravery, and get ready to do compassion together, friends.

Yours in the joy and the work,

Teresa, on behalf of the whole Soul Matters team

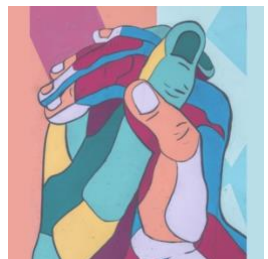


At the Table

Exploring Compassion Through Discussions

At the Table questions explore the monthly theme through a discussion for all ages. They are designed for a family gathering - maybe during a Friday night meal, a quiet moment in the living room or before a board game night.

1. If compassion were a color, what would it be?
2. Which fairy tale or folk tale character is the most compassionate?
3. Former U.S. President George H.W. Bush had the nickname “Have Half” in college, because he was always eager to share what he had with whomever asked or needed. What other nicknames might show that someone is compassionate?
4. Can animals be compassionate? If so, how do they show it?
5. Can nature be compassionate? If so, how does it show it?
6. Who’s a young person you know who is really compassionate? And who’s a grown-up you know who is really compassionate?
7. Is it easier to be compassionate if you have everything you need to learn and grow, or if you don’t?
8. Why do people show compassion for one another?
9. Can you feel compassion for someone you’ve never met?
10. Can you be kind without feeling compassion?
11. When you’re feeling compassion, what look is on your face?
12. What is the difference between compassion and kindness? tenderness? Pity?
13. Does compassion hurt?
14. When was a time that compassion motivated you to do something really hard, that you otherwise might not have done?



Around the Neighborhood

Around the Neighborhood activities engage families with their surroundings through the lens of the theme. It's about perceiving your well-known world in new ways. Usually, we ask you to take our monthly treasure hunt list with you on your trips to the grocery, jaunts around the neighborhood, walks and rides, etc. to transform your everyday travel into a family adventure. This month, we're adventuring from the safety of our own homes, going farther than we ever could before!

Messages of Compassion Sent from Your Home

In 2015, UU religious educator Kimberly Sweeney shared a fun and simple spiritual practice that she'd adopted the year before. It was writing letters! But not just any letters. Kimberley wrote MAGICAL letters. She was feeling blue at the end of a long and difficult winter where she lived, in New England. (And it gets COLD in New England.) She probably missed playing outside with friends. She probably missed being able to go to friends' houses to hang out. And she probably missed seeing friends' beloved faces, and getting and giving hugs, high-fives, or waves hello with twinkly-eyed smiles. Maybe this is how you feel this month, after a long and difficult winter, and then spring, of living in the pandemic.

Kimberly knew she wasn't the only one who might need some connection and kindness in hard times. So, she started sending her people letters, real letters, sent in the mail--and she made them wonderful--magical, even! She surprised people with clever, colorful, unexpected missives until the hard times became better.

Our neighborhoods may still not be places where it's safe and wise to wander about and make contact with others. So again this month, we're imagining a neighborhood of the whole country, continent, or even world!! And, instead of us looking for treasures, we're going to scatter treasures, through our letters.

In letters to friends and family members, challenge yourself to include at least three of the following:

1. One each of these rather silly words (in a natural, conversational way): cactus, rolling pin, zesty, crimped, zoom, and quaver.
2. A letter written or typed with each sentence in a different color.
3. A letter typed with an old, "real" typewriter.
4. A note that starts with the words, "Thank you..."
5. A drawing or printed-out photograph of you wearing a funny hat
6. A quote from [a famous UU](#)
7. Add confetti into your envelope along with your letter.
8. A home-made bookmark (see Extra Mile section for tutorials!)
9. A string of paper dolls (see Extra Mile section for tutorials!)



At Play

Playing Games with Compassion

At Play activities are a way to joyfully, playfully, and imaginatively experience the theme in one's body.

Option A: Compassion Charades

Studies show that when we are able to name our feelings, even just to ourselves, we are able to better manage them. Sometimes it's fun to be carried away by a feeling! Being able to dive deep into joy, love, excitement, intrigue, curiosity, and others is wonderful. But other times, when a feeling is interfering with our ability to move on to other things in our lives--anger, resentment, disappointment--it's helpful to be able to recognize, name, and release a feeling. It's a choice we all have and being able to match a feeling in our mind, heart, and body with a name helps. You might even think of it as showing yourself some compassion.

For this game, we'll be playing charades using feeling words, to see if we can get family members to guess what we're feeling based on our movements, facial expression, gestures, or other signals. [Here's a good list of feelings](#). Not all of these feelings might be known to all your family members, and that's fine. Pick the ones that work best for you or use a "word bank" that all can see so they can narrow down a guess. And here is a cute [demonstration](#) of how this game might work, from the characters of the movie *Inside Out*.

Option B: Compassion Through Cooperation

Cooperative games are great ways to exercise compassion. When the goal is accomplished with everyone working together, players look at the circumstances of others around them to see how they can help, so that their shared endeavor succeeds. Quality board games can often be expensive, upwards of \$100! But these are more affordable options:

[Max \(The Cat\)](#) \$15

[Wildcraft! An Herbal Adventure Game](#) (\$37)

[Fox in the Forest Duet](#) (\$14)

[Codenames: Duet](#) (\$16)

[Double Ditto](#) (\$30)

[Spaceteam](#) (\$27)

[Shadows in the Forest](#) (\$18)

**Note that this game involves one seeker, and the rest of the players acting as a team to evade the seeker*



On the Message Board

A Monthly Mantra for Compassion

The On the Message Board section lifts up a theme-related mantra for your family to carry with them throughout the month. Think of these “family sayings” as tools for the journey, reminders that help us re-focus and steady ourselves and our kids as we navigate through life’s challenges and opportunities. Write them on sticky notes to put in your car, on kitchen cabinet fronts, in lunch boxes, on computer screens and, of course, on your family message board. Share them out loud at home and out in the world, where and whenever the need arises.

June’s Mantra: “Look with Love”



Sometimes, a nonverbal cue is what is most effective in helping us to move from a place of stuckness to a place of flow. In this instance, we are making that iconic heart gesture with our index fingers and thumbs, over our own eyes, so that we can communicate that the situation might call for looking through a lens of love--in other words, looking at the circumstances with compassion.

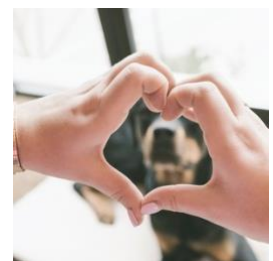
So, what might this look like? How could it be used? Here are a couple of hypothetical dialogs as examples:

“I hate online school. This doesn’t even seem like real work.”

(Making the heart sign over your own eyes.) Looking with love, I can see what a weird and challenging end-of-year this has been for you and your classmates. I’ve seen you work really hard under bizarre circumstances.

“I hardly talk to Amaya or Josie anymore. I doubt they’re even still my friends.”

(Making the heart sign over your own eyes.) Looking with love, I can see how friendship just isn’t the same over Zoom and email as it is in real life. And, we might need to be creative and thoughtful about rebuilding friendships when it’s safe to do so.



Of course, this mantra/gesture could be overused, but if employed judiciously, after a while, you may simply be able to make the heart shape over your own eyes to nonverbally remind your child to “look with love,” have compassion on themselves and others, and try on a new perspective. (This works as a personal reminder, too!)

An easy criticism to imagine is an older child pushing back with, “You’re just saying that because you’re my parent.” Or, “I don’t really feel like looking with love right now.” Both of these are valid. And, you might say something like, *“Looking at a situation with compassion is always a choice we have. It might not fit at the moment, and that’s ok. It’s available as an option.”* (Keep in mind, too, that not all responses call for a person to look with love immediately, such as when someone is victimized. Use your judgment about when this strategy that engages compassion would be most appropriate and effective.)

Note: This gesture might be nice to combine with our “At the Bedside” section, where we consider together ways we might reach out from a place of compassion, even when we feel less than powerful. Use the looking-with-love mantra with your gaze out toward the hurting world to consider together how you might take action on behalf of others in need.



At the Bedside

The Bedside activities engage the theme through storytelling. This takes place during the dreamy, almost otherworldly hour or so before children or youth drift off to sleep. Through stories and the questions and realizations that they prompt, we come to understand the nature of and our own place in the cosmos. But also, these selections invite you to remember, shape, and share stories from your own past, using thoughtful narratives to help your child weave the tale of who they are and whose they are.

Compassion in Action: The Fox and the Lion

This bedtime story was adapted by [Hannah McConnaughay](#) and [Renee Ruchotzke](#), as part of their interfaith youth curriculum, “A Chorus of Faiths.” One of the story’s themes is compassion, specifically, taking action from a place of compassion for another, as a way to embody divine love.

[The Fox and the Lion](#)

Read the story above, and consider the following prompts to add to whatever questions or observations arise naturally:

Have you ever prayed to ask for something? What happened?

What do you have a lot of that is easy to share with others? What is precious to you, that might be harder to share?

Sometimes we can be like the fox in one situation, needing help and support, but be like the lion in another situation. How could we help and support others in need, even if we...
aren’t able to leave our homes?
don’t know what the other person needs?
don’t have the thing the other person needs?
feel as if no one listens to us, or cares what we say?

Parents: ahead of time, think about a time that you were able to assist another, even though you weren’t at your most powerful or capable. (For example, maybe you were tight on money, but found \$10 to contribute to #FreeBlackMamas during the [National Bail Out](#). Maybe you were injured, but asked a friend to accompany you, going slowly and carefully, to the protest over imprisoned children at the U.S./Mexico border.) Be sure to highlight why these sacrifices were so important to you, what compassion looks and feels like to you, and what you learned after you took action.

A Prayer for Compassion

If there was some energy around the idea of prayer as you read this story, consider reciting [this one](#), from Thich Nhat Hanh, which is also reading number 505 in the Unitarian Universalist hymnal, Singing the Living Tradition.



On the Porch

Raising a Child of Resilience Together

On the Porch supports sharing realizations, challenges and hopes around the theme with other supportive adults. Perhaps this happens on a literal porch or front stoop, but it could happen wherever a parent or parents and their circle of support gather and talk over the soulful parts of parenthood.

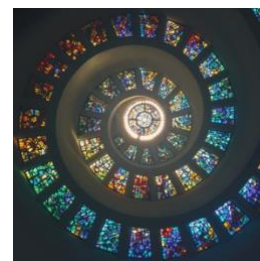
Author and activist Parker Palmer talks about the value of bringing a “[third thing](#)” into conversations among partners or small groups--words, pictures, music, etc. that can act as catalysts for deeper sharing. We present that idea as “a sip of something more,” a monthly source of nourishment that tantalizes and brings to mind a new insight, memory, or feeling.

A Sip of Something More:

NPR host Krista Tippett, who gave the 2016 Ware Lecture at the Unitarian Universalist General Assembly, in 2010 gave a [TED talk on “compassion”](#) in which she encouraged the audience to give body back to the word. The idea of compassion had been hollowed out by our culture, she said, but its virtues were manifold, and worth reclaiming.

Her 15-minute talk is deeply wise and rich, so doubtless much will come to mind to discuss. If you need some prompts, here are a few ideas to play with, together with your partner or best deep-thinking buddy:

- What do you think the connection is between awareness of one’s own body, and compassion for all of life? What have you done lately to connect with your own body?
- When is it good for compassion to be “driven and aggressive”? (You might think specifically of our shared task of dismantling white supremacy culture here.)
- Tippett says that “It’s much harder to be compassionate toward those closest to us.” Have you found this to be true in your family? How so?
- “Compassion is rarely a solution, but it is always a sign of a deeper reality, of deeper human possibilities.” What is the deeper reality of your family life from which compassion flows?
- Tippett closes by saying we need our traditions--one of which is Unitarian Universalism--to mine the wisdom of compassion as a “spiritual technology,” a skill, method, or process needed to achieve a goal, namely, becoming “one human race.” What does Unitarian Universalism teach you about compassion as a tool for justice?



Spiritual Snacks to Share

In addition to your “third thing,” bring one or two of these questions with you when the time comes to hang out with your co-parent or buddies. Don’t treat the questions as a list to go through one by one. Instead pick the one or two that speak to you the most, using them as bite-sized opportunities to dive deeper into the role of parent, partner, and person of spirit and conscience.

1. What has your experience of the last three months taught you about compassion?
2. For whom in your wider circle of acquaintances--postal workers, retail clerks, delivery drivers, etc. have you discovered a new compassion?
3. What’s the most direct way for you to be able to access compassion for others? What do you think, imagine, do, etc. to get there?
4. Does everyone deserve compassion? People who are rich and powerful? People who have criminal records? People who work in industries such as natural gas fracking, weapons manufacturing, pornography? Does your compassion have limits?
5. When did you experience compassion as a child? How did it feel?
6. When you encounter suffering, how do you move from overwhelm to compassion?
7. When have you needed compassion, but not found it?
8. When have you offered compassion, though it was not expected?
9. What would the features of a “compassionate community” be? What would it feel like to live there?
10. How have you taught your child to have self-compassion?
11. What has compassion moved you to sacrifice?
12. How has compassion strengthened you?



The Extra Mile

The Extra Mile section is for families who want to continue exploring the theme of the month through larger adventures, more complex projects or simply through additional modalities not otherwise included in the packets. The Extra Mile suggestions often surpass what is considered an “everyday moment” in a family, and may involve more preparation, planning, or time to accomplish. A bit more effort, but well worth it!

Holding on to One Another: Compassionate “Touch”

A chain of paper dolls holding hands can be a nice way to let a friend know that even when it is not safe to touch hands in real life, we are still connected to them.

This is a [sweet tutorial](#) for making paper doll chains in the most familiar, gingerbread-person shape. But there are [other shapes](#) you might enjoy trying, too. All you need is paper and scissors.

If you decide to send out letters or cards to neighbors and farther-away friends in your “Around the Neighborhood” section this month, these chains can be a fun addition to that mail!

Finding Compassion in Stories--and Marking it!

Many families, during the pandemic, have rediscovered read-alouds, or done a lot more solo reading than they’d done in the past. Stories can offer a way for us to grow our compassion; narratives invite us to immerse ourselves in another’s experience, thinking their thoughts and feeling their feelings.

A colorful drawing on a thin length of paper works just fine as a bookmark. A small piece of beloved fabric does, too. Here are some other creative ideas:

<https://www.architectureartdesigns.com/25-creative-diy-bookmarks-ideas/>

Note that the paperclip bookmarks (a few of which are among the choices in the above link) don’t work as well with the smallest and youngest of hands, as they can easily tear a page.

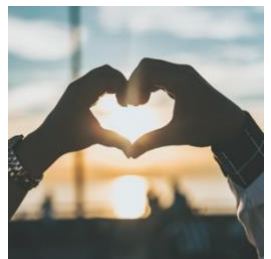
This bookmark tutorial, a heart that wraps around a page’s corner, might intrigue an avid airplane-folder or other origami lover, and ties in well with our theme of compassion, wrapping the world in love:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UqE4WbR-9t4>



Blessing

Bless your wide-open hearts and bright, fearless eyes that refuse to look away, you brave, compassionate souls. Bless your hands that, shaking, maybe, or quietly, quickly, grab a few more dollars from your billfold, click again to spread the messages of hope and requests for help, reach across the distance to accept the love and support from those who need to give (though you may feel uncertain about receiving). Bless you for showing our children how to do this thing, how to live like we're connected, how to love like we're in it all--everything, every part--together. Of course, we are.



Connect with more Inspiration for your family and for you...

Parents can Join our Facebook and Instagram pages for
daily inspiration on our themes:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcircle/?ref=settings>

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/soul_matters_circle/

Parents and youth will want to check out our music playlists on the monthly themes.
One playlist is one [Spotify](#) and another on our [YouTube](#) channel

Soulful Home packets are prepared by
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