



Soulful Home

Finding the Sacred in
Our Everyday Spaces



October 2021
Cultivating Relationship

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The Welcome Mat

What Does it Mean to be a Family Cultivating Relationship?

Relationships ask us to answer the “who” questions: Who is in our circle of friendship? Who is not? Who makes up our family? Whose absence in our family do we notice and remember? Who were we yesterday? And who are we now, changed?

These questions, pondered together, take us right to the heart of what it means to be human. It is in relationship with others that we come to know ourselves and our place on the interconnected web of all existence. This is where we find ourselves this month as Soulful Home families.

English pronouns get in the way here, but in other languages, there is no distinction between the pronoun used for a sibling or a tree or the ocean--they are all personal pronouns--“ who” pronouns-- indicating our inextricable link with all of creation. This month, we’ll be stretching beyond English’s limitations and cultivating relationships with these other creations, too. Our Around the Neighborhood section invites us into a grand adventure of acknowledging the non-human entities around us with whom we interact every day.

At least once this month, be sure, too, to seek out that trusted friend, or make time with your parenting partner, to sit out “On the (metaphorical!) Porch.” There, you’ll find “At Least Ten Reasons Why You Love Them,” and a handful of carefully chosen questions that will help you go deeply together into both your pasts, presents, and futures.

Any grower can tell you that cultivating can be tough work, and our current times have certainly taught us that nourishing our relationships can be no easy endeavor, either. Let your time with your family challenge and inspire you to keep at it together, along with Soulful Home families all over the continent, because we know that it is our connections that will save us and keep us rooted in “home.”

In faith,

Teresa, on behalf of the Soul Matters team



At the Table

Exploring Story 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.

Introducing the Activity

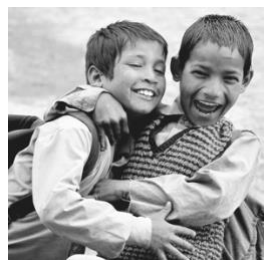
Family members who are readers can alternate who reads the questions. Those who are not readers are invited to share their own impromptu questions. Discussion partners might answer as thoughts come to them or take turns in a circle.

Discussion Questions

1. How can you tell if someone wants to be friends with you?
2. What do you do when you want to be friends with someone? How do you cultivate a closer relationship to them?
3. Who is the most recent person you got to know better? How did you meet them?
4. Who is the person in your life that you've been friends with the longest?
5. What are things you do or say to let your friends know that you care about them, and about your friendship?
6. Have you ever experienced growing away from a friend, or a friendship simply fading into the background? What was that like?
7. What is one reason NOT to be friends with someone?
8. What's something you wonder about an elder in your life or an ancestor of yours? Would you ever consider asking them about it?
9. What is your relationship like with your home? Do you have a feeling about your home's "personality" or "moods"?
10. If you could use one word to describe your relationship with your pet (or the critters who live in your neighborhood), what would it be?
11. What words would you use to describe your relationship with your body?
12. What TV show or movie character would you most like to have as a real-life friend? Why?
13. How do you have a relationship with your past self? Do you ever find yourself "talking to" the "younger you"?

Return to the Discussion Throughout the Week

Thoughts develop with time. Find opportunities to bring up particularly compelling questions again during the month, maybe on walks, rides home, when tucking your child in to bed, etc. If thoughts grew or changed, notice together how we are all evolving beings, opening ourselves to new truths and understandings as we live our lives and connect with others.



Around the Neighborhood

Around the Neighborhood activities engage families with their surroundings through the lens of the theme. It's about perceiving our well-known world in new ways. As you safely move around your neighborhood during this time of Covid, these suggestions help you transform your everyday backs-and-forths into a family adventure!

Treasure Hunt for Cultivating Relationship

Anishanaabe author Wendy Sisiip Geniuz, in her book, [*Plants Have So Much to Give Us, All We Have to Do Is Ask*](#) describes the practice in Anishanaabe language of using the same honorifics for cedar and birch trees as one would use for a grandmother or grandfather. It is a recognition, she says, of the role of those two, special trees in the development of the culture.

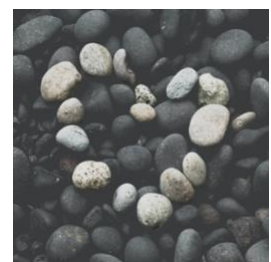
We depend on many, many non-human entities in our neighborhoods, too, for our survival, our safety, and our joy.

So, for your treasure hunt this month, gather ten stones. Your task together is to find ten things with which you are “in relationship” and mark them with a stone, saying out loud how you are connected, and why it’s important to you.

For example, you might lay one stone on the edge of a footbridge over a highway: “This bridge lets us cross safely to the park.” You might lay one at the edge of a beautifully colored maple tree: “I feel happy whenever I look at this tree.” You might place one at the bottom of your mailboxes: “I get my birthday cards from Gran here, and I send stickers to my cousin.”

With each place you mark, go a little deeper and name the materials that each thing is made of. A tree, of course, is a carbon-based life form just like us. But a bridge? You have the rocks that were ground into cement. You have metal that was mined and formed into guardrails and joiners. A mailbox, too, might be metal, plus plastic, which was derived from oil, which used to be carbon-based life forms! It can take a little thinking to tease all this apart, but it’s worth the effort to see how deeply connected we are to everything we see, hear, taste, touch, and smell, and how all of this comes from our earth. If you wanted to take this ritual of recognition one step further, you could write the words, “Thank you,” on a piece of paper to put under each stone marker.

The places where we live become the backdrop of our lifetime worth of memories and stories. It makes sense to conscientiously cultivate a positive and gratitude-filled relationship with the spaces we inhabit, and to acknowledge them as the treasures that they are!



From the Mailbox

Our literal mailboxes connect us to the wide world outside, sometimes with messages asking things from us (a donation letter or flyer encouraging us to vote), sometimes with messages offering us gifts (a letter from a friend or a special delivery). Our “From the Mailbox” section applies this metaphor to today’s call for families to engage in the work of dismantling white supremacy culture. Together each month, as a Soulful Home community, we open and accept these “invitations” to join some of the many brave, inspiring and wise leaders and organizations who are co-creating a future that is actively anti-racist.

Soulful Home Mailbox Book: Adrienne Maree Brown’s *We Will Not Cancel Us: And Other Dreams of Transformational Justice*

At Soulful Home, we have not yet recommended a book for us to read together. But this is a book worth being a first. It is short, and very, very powerful. In it, Brown calls us back into our Source, into our connections, and into relationship--exactly the place for people of faith to be. You can read more about it, as well as an interview with Brown about how the book came to be, and what it now means to her now, [here](#).

<https://www.uuabookstore.org/We-Will-Not-Cancel-Us-P18750.aspx>

If you can read this with a buddy, do so, because you are definitely going to want to talk about it.

Cultivating Better Relationships with Self

According to the National Institutes of Mental Health, fully 25% of 13- to 18-year-olds will experience an anxiety disorder. As caregivers, we have only so much control over the environmental and broader cultural stressors they will encounter. But we can influence the ways they do--or don’t--internalize the most damaging of the messages they are receiving.

Meditation and movement coach [Kimberly Campbell](#) guides us toward kinder self-talk in [this 12-minute video](#). Watch it together with some combination of your loved ones, and afterward, talk about what you noticed. Did anything shift inside you, or click into place? Did you find yourself resisting any part of it? Name one phrase or practice that you’ll be carrying forward from this exercise.

Consider joining up with another couple of families to sponsor a local school teacher in taking a class such as Mindfulness Foundations, offered by the organization, [Mindful Schools](#). (It’s \$95.) Mindfulness practices in school have been shown to improve outcomes for all students--this is an investment in your community!



At Play

Playing Games with Cultivating Relationship

At Play activities and questions are a way to joyfully, playfully, and imaginatively experience the theme.

Option A: Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon

In 1994, a group of three college students invented the parlor game, Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon, to demonstrate--humorously--how everyone in the movie-making industry could be related back to Kevin Bacon within six relationships. The idea came from a mathematical concept articulated earlier in the 20th century, which was an algorithm that showed how all humans on earth were in relationship to one another within six degrees through their social circles. Bacon himself first took the game as an insult, but later realized, "If you think about it, it's really beautiful. If you take me out of it, it's really all about connectivity, which is what we're all looking for."

With older kids, you might play this game in its original form, using actors and musicians to connect back to Kevin Bacon. (Hint: Use the internet here, unless your family includes very very well-informed movie watchers and music fans!)

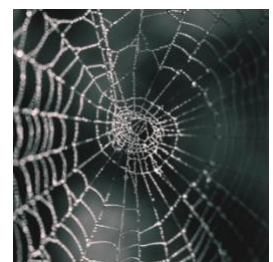
With younger kids, you might see if you can connect two cartoon characters, using settings, physical traits, or voice actors as the connections. For example, how could you connect Uniqua, the main character from Nickelodeon's Backyardigans, to Martin Kratt, from the Wild Kratts?

Here's one way we thought of:

One of Uniqua's best friends is Pablo, who is a blue penguin.

The Wild Kratts learn about penguins in their "Mystery of the North Pole Penguins?" episode, and Martin Kratt's penguin creature power suit is blue!

Use your child's favorite and most familiar shows, and keep the number of connections pretty low to make this most accessible.



Option B: The Little Red Hen

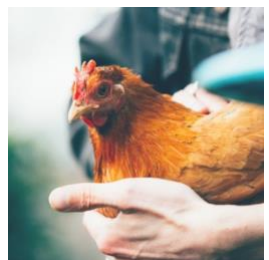
[This is the script](#) for a reader's theater performance of the European folk tale, The Little Red Hen. The idea of a reader's theater is that it can be done with little to no preparation, props, or blocking. The readers use only their voices to convey the story.

This is where a family can get very, very playful! Without any fear of being self-conscious (because you are only performing with people you love and trust!), you can be as loud, silly, weird, and experimental as you like.

This story is about a sometimes-consequence of *not* cultivating relationships within our communities. There's room for exploration here, but since this is in our At Play section, you might choose to leave the theme tie-ins implied. Or, you could lightly toss out one of the following questions as your playing winds down:

- What would have changed if even one of the other animals had helped Little Red Hen?
- What other choices did she have at the end?
- Were relationships on the farm better, or worse at the end of this story?

For not-yet readers, have an experienced reader do the reading, and let the not-yet reader act out the action, or use toys or puppets to do so.



On the Message Board

A Monthly Reminder

The On the Message Board section lifts up a theme-related mantra, graphic, quote, or gesture for your family to carry with them throughout the month. Think of these “family sayings” or “family signs” as tools for the journey, reminders that help us refocus and steady ourselves and our kids as we navigate through life’s challenges and opportunities.

October’s Message:

“I honor the inherent worth and dignity of every person, beginning with myself.”

Do you recognize this month’s mantra? It’s a variation of our first Unitarian Universalist Principle. It’s a mouthful, but worth having on the tip of your tongue as we explore cultivating relationships together. Our faith communities are the places where we learn about and practice being in relationship together in new and better ways. And those lessons sink in the most when we make a point of internalizing and applying them to ourselves, too.

Don’t wait for the perfect moment to remind yourself of this principle; start every day with it this month, as a family. Maybe place both hands over your heart, close your eyes, and say this together right after breakfast, or whenever or wherever you’re all gathered, even briefly.

If you catch yourself in negative self-talk during the day (a concept we explore more in the From the Mailbox section this month, with coach Kimberly Campbell), say this mantra to yourself to reground in your faith-anchored truth. After a month spent rooted in this truth, and feeling its effects on ourselves, we are then ready to act in the world, and in relationship as people who can embody and acknowledge dignity and worth in others.



At the Bedside

At 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.

Mabouya: Chief of the Well

Being in relationship through our waters

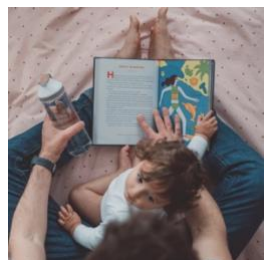
If it's a custom in your family to have a small cup of water before bed, try a little something special on the night you plan to read this story. Prepare some lemon water, or mint or cucumber water--something that stays clear but has a different taste. Let your child be surprised when they take a sip. Use that experience of surprise, to talk for a minute about how important it is to "wake up" every once in a while to how special and important water is, not only for our survival, but for the survival of all life on earth.

Also, if you have a little toy or plush lizard, you might hand it to your child to play with quietly as you read. And maybe start that off by offering your special stuffed creature a sip of water!

This story comes from the multigenerational Unitarian Universalist curriculum, "Gather the Spirit," written by Christine T. Rafal and Richard S. Kimball. The story is adapted from a Haitian tale called [Mabouya: Chief of the Well](#).

For Discussion:

- Why do you think Mabouya kept the other animals away?
- How can we protect something and share it at the same time?
- Parents and caregivers, tell a story from your own past that takes place in a public pool, or swimming hole, or the ocean. It could be as simple as, "I remember going to the river with my cousins when I was about your age. I was always too scared to swing way out on the rope, but I loved diving as far down as I could to try and touch the bottom." Make one of the messages of your story how important it is that we share our water, not only for drinking, but for fun.



On the Porch

Raising a Child of Story 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 parents and their circle of support gather and talk (online or in person) over the soulful parts of parenthood. The “A Sip of Something New” section invites you and your discussion partner to take in a new idea shared by someone else. The “Spiritual Snacks” section stimulates personal storytelling and the sharing of your own wisdom and experience.

A Sip of Something New

This activity comes from our Soul Matters Small Group packet. You are going to love it, in the disclosed specifics and in the afterglow! -- Teresa

At Least Ten Reasons Why You Love Them

Relationships require comment, at least every once in a while. The precious people in our lives know we love, appreciate and adore them, but it doesn't hurt for us to tell them exactly why that is so. There is something about saying it out loud that breathes life back into our connections. There's something about giving voice to the reasons for our love that makes that love real.

This is what the poet, Matthew Olzmann, understands better than most. In his poem, [Mountain Dew Commercial Disguised as a Love Poem](#), he lists all the reasons why he loves his partner, or as he puts it, “the reasons why our marriage might work.” And the genius of the poem is the level of detail it contains. One after another, he lists the extremely particular. He goes to great pains to be precise. That's where the power rests, he seems to say.

So, here's your exercise: Write your own “Mountain Dew” poem! Pick someone precious in your life and make an exceedingly specific list of the reasons why you treasure them. Don't stress about the poetic structure or try to make it perfect. Just sit down and make a list.

And when you are done, consider giving it to your precious person. And, better yet, invite them to spend an evening on with you on your porch or front stoop or a bench in the park, and ask them if you can read it to them aloud. Where the conversation goes from there will surely involve nurturing a deeper connection for both of you.

Extra: Here's a video of the poem being read aloud:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpplxELjtkM>



Spiritual Snacks to Share

Bring 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. Treat the questions less as a quiz and more like doorways inviting you into the world of storytelling and memory.

Questions

1. What does this precise moment, in relationship with your trusted friend or partner, mean to you?
2. In what ways have others showed up for you throughout your life? In what ways have you showed up for others?
3. At what point in your life did you learn to set boundaries for who gets to be in your life, and who doesn't?
4. In what landscape do you feel most you?
5. What does it mean to you to invest in a friendship? Do you find that work difficult, or easy?
6. What's your best tool for repairing a relationship that's been damaged? Who taught you how to use that tool?
7. How would you describe your relationship with your own past?
8. Who is coming into your life right now? What does their presence mean to 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!

Making Shadow Puppets

This activity is inspired by our bedtime story, “Mabouya: Chief of the Well,” which would be fun to retell throughout the month using shadow puppets. Shadow puppets come together easily from household items--paper or cardstock, tape or stickers, and thin sticks or chopsticks--plus a flashlight or phone light.

Here’s a good tutorial, which also has extensions into the science of shadows:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yqmXAm1Cw3k>

To make puppets for our story, you’ll want

- A lizard
- A cow
- A horse
- A well
- God (Wow! Imagine all the ways you could draw God!)

Note: *If you decided not to use our bedtime story as your cast of characters, you could also explore relationships by depicting animals in a food chain, the evolution of humans, multigenerational members in a family, or creatures who all share an ecosystem, such as a lake or river.*

Being in Relationship with a Bulb

Fall is the time of year to plant many different kinds of bulbs (or rhizomes) for spring flowers. Bulbs are often easy to care for, take up very little space, and are inexpensive. This is a long-term project, beginning now, in mid-fall, and culminating next spring. We’re going to use the activity to practice cultivating--or taking care of--something gently, with trust in the process.

Buy a daffodil, tulip, allium, hyacinth, or lily bulb, or an iris rhizome, and plant it in a spot that gets good sun, and that you’ll see come springtime. From Southern Canada to Central Florida, your plant will do its happy thing underground until little green leaves poke up some time from February to April. Outside of those zones, or if it’s not possible to plant in the ground, use a pot to plant in, and keep the pot from both getting too warm or from freezing through (but it’s good if the pot gets cold). Every so often, you might want to wonder aloud to your child about your bulb or go outside together and check the surface of the dirt.

When spring comes, you’ll both be delighted by what comes up. And, you’ll have the opportunity to talk about how sometimes, cultivating relationships means trusting that someone or something else knows what it needs, and that we can observe with love as that person or thing grows into what it is meant to be.



Blessing of Cultivating Relationship

Blessed is the astronomical improbability that resulted in exactly you being born, exactly you growing up, exactly you cultivating a childhood for a so-very-important member of the next generation of humans. Blessed are the threads that connect us to one another, the universal conscience, the circumstances, the kinship networks that bring us into one another's lives bearing gifts of joy, laughter, and teaching. And blessed is the earth beneath you, where at precisely this moment you are sitting, laying, standing, dancing, or swaying; that earth has nourished eons of life forms--grand, grand, grandparent to all of creation.



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

Credits

Soulful Home packets are prepared by
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