



Soulful Home

Finding the Sacred in
Our Everyday Spaces

February 2022
Widening the Circle

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The Welcome Mat

What Does it Mean to be a Family Widening the Circle?

I've been learning a lot about the concept of "ingroups" lately, from the field of psychology. Ingroups are groups where we feel belonging, because we share something important to us in common with all the other members of the group. You likely have several ingroups. Maybe you are dedicated to a sports team, and follow and participate in fan groups in person or online. Maybe you spend time with a naturalist group doing trail and habitat restoration. Perhaps you ride with other cyclists, and together advocate for better bike awareness and infrastructure in your region. On your social justice team in your church or covenanted community, you may be leading your family of faith toward more just and effective action. All of these ingroups, and others like them, give us a sense of belonging as well as being among "our people," which feels good, and at its best, amplifies our efforts to make the world better.

And, it can sometimes be really difficult to belong to and enjoy an ingroup while also widening the circle for others not only to join us, but to change us with their unique, divine spark. That is one very tricky needle to thread! How do you...

- Identify and nurture the core of who you are, as a group;
- while also cultivating curiosity and openness that allows the group to grow and evolve;
- all the while fostering a sense of trust and belonging among long timers and incomers, alike?

This is the loving edge of the circle we are called to as Unitarian Universalists, and in our families is where this work begins.

This month, we'll be foregrounding the concepts of belonging and including, and making our way toward the ideas of adapting and evolving *together*. In this way, we're laying groundwork for widening the circle, an essential task for us as a faith group. Are you up for the challenge? Together, let's jump in!

Teresa, on behalf of the *Soul Matters* team

P.S. You're going to need a couple of hula hoops. Trust us on this one!



At the Table

Exploring Widening the Circle 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. What makes your family unique? What is one thing about your family that is different from most other families?
2. How do you welcome new neighbors, classmates, people to your church, or other kids into your troops/groups/clubs/sports, etc.?
3. Can you be welcoming without using words? What would that look and feel like?
4. When you see someone on the outskirts of a group, not sure how to join in, what do you usually do? When it's you on the outskirts of a group, what would you like someone to do?
5. How do dogs welcome one another? Cats? Birds?
6. Who in the family is the best at meeting new people? What makes them great at it?
7. Which is easier for you:
 - a. being with single other person,
 - b. being in a small group, or
 - c. being in a large group?
8. If a guest stayed in your home, how would you help them to feel welcomed?
9. What do you think this quote, from author Vernā Myers, means: "Diversity is being asked to the party; inclusion is being asked to dance"?
10. What makes your church a welcoming place? How could you help it be even better at it?

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 Widening the Circle

Let's look for circles!

1. A car with circular brake lights instead of the usual rectangular
2. A fairy ring (mushrooms growing in a circle)
3. A light-up sign with the "O" out
4. A dog, cat, horse, or other animal with a roundish patch of fur in a contrasting color (Think the puppy 'Patch' in Disney's *101 Dalmatians*.)
5. Someone wearing a scarf, sweater, or another piece of clothing with a circle motif
6. A circle with a candle, flame, or chalice inside
7. Someone wearing hoop earrings
8. A railroad crossing sign
9. People sitting or standing in a circle
10. A fire ring
11. A circular fountain
12. A circular hairstyle—maybe a bun, or a headband, or an afro, or a bowl cut...
13. A stop light
14. Tires on a car
15. A full moon
16. The rings found in a tree stump
17. A Ferris wheel
18. A basketball hoop



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.

Circle Meditation

L.A. based yoga and meditation teacher Michelle Goldstein offers this 20-minute guided meditation inviting us to create an imaginary circle into which we bring people of our choosing.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eVQ3Mfklarc>

Now, first you invite people into the circle whom you care about deeply; or whom you don't know well but admire; or maybe about whom you have neutral feelings. Once you get several such people into your circle, and you have greeted them, and they have greeted each other, you have a kind of energy in the circle that is positive and supportive.

Then, at minute 10:40, you are asked to invite in someone who challenges you. In our shared purpose of widening the circle, this is where we are going to do the hard thing.

Feeling the support of those in the circle you have already created, much like we hope to support one another as a people of faith, invite in someone whose ideas about racial justice you do not agree with. Take care here not to invite in someone who triggers you (unless you feel ready to do that), but rather someone who seems unwilling to alter their long-held beliefs about what racial justice should look like, or unable to make room for new understandings that are more inclusive.

Invitation: After doing this meditation yourself, send it along to the people you brought to mind, especially the person with whom you disagreed. You don't have to tell them that they were your difficult person (!), but you can say that you thought of them as you meditated and thought they might enjoy this exercise, too.

Whether we enjoy it or not, we are all in the big circle—our society—together. So this meditation allows us to feel the support of our chosen group as we attempt to be loving, compassionate, justice-loving people in our presently divisive and fractured culture.



Beginning Where We Are: Skillful Conversations Around Race

For our children and youth, the away-from-home place where they are most likely to encounter conversations around race is their educational institution, be that a school, community center, sports facility, or learning co-op. However, how impactful and effective that conversation will be at guiding the participants toward justice-seeking will depend heavily on the skill of the facilitator. How well do you think your child’s coach, teacher, or group leader could handle such topics? Have you had conversations with them about this topic? I’m sure many, if not most of them would welcome extra support in that area.

Your community may have a local organization that offers services such as trainings and support groups for educators and facilitators wanting to more artfully and equitably engage themes of race. [The Center for Racial Justice in Education](#), based in New York City, offers virtual trainings, too.

Educational institutions that are able to skillfully widen the circle for all learners to grow into the fullness of their capabilities reflect our UU values. What would it take to raise enough funds to sponsor a team of educators from your child’s educational institution? Are you up for the challenge of making that happen?

The invitation: Reach out to just one coach, teacher, troop leader, or other influential adult in your child’s life. Ask them if the topic of race has come up in the group, and if so, how they handled it. If you sense that they’d be open to it, and if your means allow it, offer to pay for and take a training along with them to help you both gain confidence in this area.



At Play

Playing Games with Widening the Circle

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

Option A: Open Your Hands for Bobo Ski Watten Tatten

This hand-clapping game is played with two players, but it's so much fun to teach other people that it's almost as if the sharing of it is part of the game. And a nice thing about clapping games is that they connect people on two levels: one, you are physically touching hands, and two, when you have a rather obscure knowledge in common—i.e., the rhyme and rhythm of clapping—you feel an instant bonding!

Take a look at this cute video demonstrating how to play, from the Regent Park School of Music in Toronto, Canada:

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

Learn this clapping game as a family and be ready to bring others into your circle when the opportunity to do so safely arises!

Option B: Defended Hula Hoop Corn Hole

This game is raucous fun! You'll need a hula hoop and three (rather soft) bean bags for each person playing. Most of the time, the game is played with two players at a time, but in a large group, with a lot of room, you could play with up to five.

Set the hula hoops up at least 8 feet apart, and maybe more, depending on your players. You might want to wear bike or hockey helmets while doing this, too.

On the count of three, you're both going to try and toss the bean bags into the OTHER person's hula hoop, while also blocking or deflecting bean bags being thrown into your OWN hoop. The winner is the person who has the least number of bean bags in their own hoop.



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.

February’s Mantra:

I belong right where I am.

Our Soulful Home take on this month’s theme of widening the circle is to consider ways that we can strengthen our family culture around belonging. Most of the activities and questions in this packet are focused on how to help others feel belonging. This mantra helps us reflect on our own worthiness of belonging, a small antidote to the sting of rejection that is an inevitable part of growing up.

This month’s mantra reminds us that even when we are not fitting in with the group we want to be fitting in with, even when we are facing aggression and rejection from members of that group, still, we belong right where we are.

This is a dicey moment. Because really, it’s the group that “decides” who does and doesn’t belong, isn’t it? That’s the double-edge of being social creatures living in interdependent societies. The “group” takes on a life of its own, a powerful life that doesn’t always reflect the values of the individual members of that group. (Our faith-wide effort at widening the circle is an attempt to correct for this sometimes-disconnect. Have you read the 2020-released report? It’s [here](#).)

So in that moment, when we have experienced rejection, we can remind ourselves—and teach our children to remind themselves—that we belong right where we are. We are loved. We are worthy. We belong in our families, who love us fiercely. We belong to our friends, who love us dearly. And with the Spirit of Mystery and Wonder dwelling in our hearts, we carry that love and worthiness with us, always, wherever we are, and in fact, can never be separated from that belonging.

The focus here is on the idea that while we can’t control when or where we experience rejection, we can tap into the deeper knowing that we *do* belong in this life, precisely where we are in this moment.



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.

Widening the Invitation:

The Hungry Coat

Do you pray before bed? Some families have a tradition of using the just-before-bed time to call to mind and heart those whom we want to include in our prayers. Some people have a list, which includes loved ones who have died, those who live far away, and others who are in special need. Other people pray for those in their communities, their countries, and our shared world whose circumstances call for extra love and caring. If this is not your family's tradition, but you like the idea, you might begin your bedtime routine with verbiage like this:

"We're going to read a story tonight about a person who isn't included. He's not welcome. Before we begin, let's name some people who we know need some extra help being included, such as people who don't speak the same language as their neighbors, or people who are new at school. Who else can we add?"

Here is [a link to the story](#), which was adapted from a traditional Middle Eastern tale that comes from the Islamic tradition, but without clear attribution beyond that. UU authors Alice Anacheke-Nasemann and Elisa Davy Pearmain adapted it for the Moral Tales curriculum.

And for ideas about how to tell the story orally, check out this fantastic video from Soul Matters collaborator Lea Morris: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tqPMMcOIL-g&t=30s>



Widening the Story:

Parents, this month, we're going to put extra effort into personalizing the lessons in the story of the Hungry Coat by telling stories about times that we have been less than inclusive, and times that we have been the one not included.

- When do you “dress up” in your family, wearing your best clothes and giving special attention to your appearance? What is your motivation for doing so? How do you hold your own desire to present a certain way alongside a value of accepting and including others who may not want—or may not be able to—present similarly? Tell about the “dressing up” culture that you grew up in, and how you felt about it as a child.
- When was a time that your appearance was out of step with those around you in a way that was difficult for you? What were the circumstances? How did you feel?
- When was a time that you misjudged someone by their appearance? Be sure, as you tell this story, that you highlight the importance of acknowledging mistakes and learning from them, that doing so is not shameful, but actually the way we grow ourselves and each other into the best versions of ourselves.



On the Porch

Raising a Child Widening the Circle 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

Rumi’s Invitation to Loving

Listen to this Rumi poem, “A Community of the Spirit,” together with your trusted friend or conversation partner. What line stands out to you? Did anything trigger an emotion, or memory? Does the thought of widening your own consciousness to include “a lover everywhere” fill you with excitement? Intimidation? fear? joy?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_vnk6chcys



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. Diversity and inclusion educator and author [Vernā Myers](#) says: “Diversity is being asked to the party; inclusion is being asked to dance.” And educator and activist [AC Goldberg](#) continues this line of thinking, asking us to move from inclusion to belonging. “Inclusion is the beginning,” he says, “Belonging makes people want to stay...and come back without fear.” Beyond places where you are included, where do you feel you *belong*?
2. All of us have a narrative of inclusion and exclusion. What's yours? Do you carry this story lightly, or does it weigh on you?
3. If we think of “belonging to” not as being possessed by or beholden to, but rather as in feeling profoundly at ease and cherished in their presence, whom do you belong to, and who belongs to you?
4. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being sorely disappointed and 10 being extremely pleased, how are you doing with your community's efforts at racial justice and racial reconciliation? Where are you in this story?
5. What is your relationship to “the American dream”? Have you always been included among those who have access to that dream? Or have you had to fight hard to be included in that group? What first comes to mind when you hear the phrase, American Dream? What feeling arises?
6. Is your circle of friends enlarging and enriching your soul, or keeping you small and impoverishing your spirit?
7. What has life taught you about widening your circle to include your enemies?
8. Has your sense of self ever widened so much that you've felt “at one with the universe”?
9. Covid limited many of our commitments and connections in our communities. For many of us, the new normal is a smaller circle of engagement and commitments. How has this been a good thing in your life?



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 Circles that Flow

It may seem hard to believe, but this super-simple activity entralls people of all ages, from just-able-to-hold-a-paintbrush to elder-with-a-background-in-Enso-painting. Painting vibrant watercolor circles elicits many emotions: playful, joyful, meditative, focus, flow...If you do this as a whole-family activity, queue up a favorite instrumental playlist, and maybe ask one another a few of the At the Table or On the Porch questions to get a zesty conversation swirling!

Check out the activity here:

<http://smallforbig.com/2013/04/watercolor-painting-kids-art-diy-kandinsky.html?>

You'll need watercolor paper, brushes, and watercolors.

If you live where it's still gray, brown, and white outside, hang these in a prominent place such as a front window to bring some color into your world!



Blessing of Widening the Circle

*May you be invited to the party,
may you be asked to dance,
may you be amazed to learn
that your own precious heart
already knows—and leaps to!—the song.
And in this moment, whirling,
in the expansive affirmation of all creation,
an embodiment of the Divine’s boundless love,
may you turn and face the door, arms outstretched
to sing in wide welcome
the ever-changing song of togetherness to those
who have yet to discover that they, too,
belong here.*



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
Teresa Youngblood,
Our Soul Matters [Family Ministry Coordinator](#)

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