

# **Practice Circle for Parents Dedicating Children**

## **Session One: The Spiritual Formation of Parenthood**

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### **Welcome**

As people arrive, share name tags and welcome them into the space.

### **Beginning the Circle**

*Distribute small sheets with chalice-lighting words and covenant.*

*Designate someone to light the chalice.*

*Pause. Deep breath. Bring your intention to setting a sacred space.*

### **Chalice Lighting**

We light this chalice

To celebrate those women and men who have taken on the task of raising a child into adulthood.

To celebrate those who have nourished the light of truth and compassion in growing minds and hearts.

To celebrate those who have committed their lives to the children of this world.

*-adapted from the words of Deane Oliva*

### **Centering Silence**

Let's take a minute of silence together to center ourselves.

### **Check-in**

Invite people to briefly share about their child/ren, their connection with Unitarian Universalism and First Universalist.

### **Introduction to the Practice Circle**

#### **Overview**

This Practice Circle is divided into three sessions:

1. The way that becoming and being parents shapes our spirits
2. Passing on our values

3. The significance and symbolism of the child dedication ritual. Our senior minister, the Rev. Justin Schroeder, will be joining us for part of this session.

## **Grounding**

Practice Circles are grounded in an understanding that:

When we listen attentively to each other, we make room for our inner wisdom to emerge. When we know that we are not going to be judged or questioned, we can open up for deeper truths and insights to emerge. We are creating a habitat for the soul to grow.

## **Guiding Practices**

As we undertake this journey together, here are some of our guiding practices:

\*We speak our own truth: A helpful reminder: If your comment can't begin with "I", then you may want to revise what you're going to say or choose to remain silent. We speak from our own experience

\*We listen receptively to the truth of others When you are listening, practice being present without thinking about how you would respond.

\*We offer each other the nurturing and empowering gifts of silence and laughter. This can be more challenging than it sounds for many of us. We offer the gift of silence by refraining from commenting on each other's words during personal reflection time -- in other words, "no crosstalk." It may likely feel awkward or unnatural to withhold a sympathetic or funny comment. However, we choose to hold back and to trust that the silence serves a helpful purpose. This will start to feel more natural over time. Once something is shared, it's honored with a little silence. A helpful tool is to take two breaths after someone has shared but before you speak.

\*In the words of Parker Palmer, "No fixing, no saving, no advising, no setting each other straight"

Are there any questions or thoughts on this way of being together?

## **Covenant**

Our covenant is a promise about how we are going to be in relationship with each other. The idea of covenant is central to Unitarian Universalism.

We are bound by the way we promise to be with and treat each other, not by identical beliefs or creeds. Our covenant holds us together in community. If we feel like things might be going astray, we can always return to our covenant.

(Distribute copies of covenant and read together in unison.)

*We covenant to honor each other with attentive listening without judgement or interruption,  
To share honestly our own experiences as we are moved,  
To maintain trust through confidentiality,  
To support each other as we explore our lives in this safe place.*

Is this a covenant that we can all agree to? (Discuss and edit as needed)

### **Reflection**

In this first gathering, we're focusing on the ways that becoming and being parents has shaped our spirits.

(Pass around questions, then read them out loud.)

Let's take a minute to reflect in silence these questions. Feel free to write down your thoughts if you wish

### **Choose one or two to answer**

- What are your highest aspirations as a parent? Your greatest fears?
- What are your sources of strength and inspiration?
- How has parenting changed you as a spiritual person? How might it form you as a spiritual person?

### **Sharing:**

When you are ready to speak, I invite you to share your personal responses to the questions and the reading.

### **Responses:**

What stirred in you as you listened to others? What themes did you hear? Any insights or "ahas" as you were listening? Remember, this is not a time to address or fix someone else's problem. Rather, it's a time for us to process what you've heard.

## **Gratitudes**

Ask people to offer one word to describe something that they're grateful for or that they're taking with them.

End by saying: For these things and many more, we are grateful. (Amen)

## **Extinguish the Flame**

**Wrap-Up and Social Time:** Remind people of the next meeting time and begin more informal conversation.

# **Practice Circle for Parents Dedicating Children**

## **Session Two: Passing On Our Values**

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### **Welcome**

As people arrive, share name tags and welcome them into the space.

### **Beginning the Circle**

*Distribute small sheets with chalice-lighting words and covenant.*

*Designate someone to light the chalice.*

*Pause. Deep breath. Bring your intention to setting a sacred space.*

### **Chalice Lighting**

We light this chalice

To celebrate those women and men who have taken on the task of raising a baby into childhood, youth, and adulthood.

To celebrate those who have nourished the light of truth and compassion in growing minds and hearts.

To celebrate those who have committed their lives to the children of this world.

*-adapted from the words of Deane Oliva*

### **Centering Silence**

Let's take a minute of silence together to center ourselves.

### **Check-in**

Invite people to briefly share:

What is something that has happened in your life since we were last together?

Is there anything you need to name in order to be fully present here?

### **Covenant**

*All read the covenant*

We covenant to honor each other with attentive listening without judgement or interruption,  
To share honestly our own experiences as we are moved,  
To maintain trust through confidentiality,  
To support each other as we explore our lives in this safe place.

Since we have a unique way of being together, I want to offer a few gentle reminders:

**Avoiding crosstalk:** We refrain from commenting on each other's words during personal reflection time. It might feel awkward, but we trust that the silence serves a helpful purpose.

**Honoring each other with silence:** After someone has shared, it's a good idea to take two breaths before you speak.

**Speaking our own truth:** If your comment can't begin with "I", then you probably want to revise what you're going to say or choose to remain silent. We speak from our own experience

### **Reflection**

In today's gathering, we're focusing on the ways that we pass along our values to our children

(Pass around questions, then read them out loud.)

Let's take a minute to reflect in silence these questions. Feel free to write down your thoughts if you wish

### **Choose one or two to answer**

- Did you grow up with any religious or spiritual traditions that are helpful or unhelpful to you in nurturing your child's spiritual development?
- What is important about Unitarian Universalism to you? What UU religious teachings do you want to pass on to your children?
- What makes it difficult to talk to children about our UU faith and beliefs?

### **Sharing:**

When you are ready to speak, I invite you to share your personal responses to the questions and the reading.

**Responses:**

What stirred in you as you listened to others? What themes did you hear? Any insights or “ahas” as you were listening? Remember, this is not a time to address or fix someone else’s problem. Rather, it’s a time for us to process what you’ve heard.

**Continued Reflection**

- How might you explain to a small child why belonging to a church is important to you?
- What family rituals may pass along your values?

**Gratitudes**

Ask people to offer one word to describe something that they’re grateful for or that they’re taking with them.

End by saying: For these things and many more, we are grateful. (Amen)

**Extinguish the Flame**

**Wrap-Up and Social Time:** Remind people of the next meeting time and begin more informal conversation.

# **Practice Circle for Parents Dedicating Children**

## **Session Three: The Child Dedication Ritual**

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### **Welcome**

As people arrive, share name tags and welcome them into the space.

### **Beginning the Circle**

*Distribute small sheets with chalice-lighting words and covenant.*

*Designate someone to light the chalice.*

*Pause. Deep breath. Bring your intention to setting a sacred space.*

### **Chalice Lighting**

We light this chalice

To celebrate those women and men who have taken on the task of raising a baby into childhood, youth, and adulthood.

To celebrate those who have nourished the light of truth and compassion in growing minds and hearts.

To celebrate those who have committed their lives to the children of this world.

*-adapted from the words of Deane Oliva*

### **Centering Silence**

Let's take a minute of silence together to center ourselves.

### **Check-in**

Invite people to briefly share:

What is something that has happened in your life since we were last together?

Is there anything you need to name in order to be fully present here?

### **Covenant**

*All read the covenant*

We covenant to honor each other with attentive listening without judgement or interruption,  
To share honestly our own experiences as we are moved,  
To maintain trust through confidentiality,  
To support each other as we explore our lives in this safe place.

### **Reflection**

In today's gathering, we're focusing on the significance and symbolism of the Child Dedication ritual

### **Time With Senior Minister, the Rev. Justin Schroeder**

Justin will discuss:

- Where does the dedication come from?
- What does it mean?
- Unpacking the symbols in the ceremony
- ...and other pertinent topics

### **Reflection**

(Pass around questions, then read them out loud.)

Let's take a minute to reflect in silence these questions. Feel free to write down your thoughts if you wish

### **Choose one or two to answer**

- What do you expect or hope for from the community as you raise your child here?
- How are you willing to engage with the community in raising your child?
- How does it feel to be part of a congregation responsible for nurturing your child's faith development?

### **Sharing:**

When you are ready to speak, I invite you to share your personal responses to the questions and the reading.

### **Responses:**

What stirred in you as you listened to others? What themes did you hear? Any insights or "ahas" as you were listening? Remember, this is not a time to address or fix someone else's problem. Rather, it's a time for us to process what you've heard.

## **Gratitudes**

Ask people to offer one word to describe something that they're grateful for or that they're taking with them.

End by saying: For these things and many more, we are grateful. (Amen)

## **Extinguish the Flame**

**Wrap-Up and Social Time:** Remind people of the next meeting time and begin more informal conversation.