



Soulful Home

Finding the Sacred in
Our Everyday Spaces

January 2020 - Integrity

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The Welcome Mat

What Does it Mean to be a Family of Integrity?

If you ask any parent what they most want for their child, they will probably say something like, “for them to be a good person.” What does this mean? We have at least a general idea of what this looks like even when our children are very young--we want them to have a sense of right and wrong, we want them to speak and act for justice, we want them to respect themselves and others. And in soulful homes, there is often also a hope that a child will develop an integration of body-mind-spirit, an integrity of self that will hold them through challenges and difficult times.

This month, we’ll be playing with different manifestations of that sense of soulful integrity.

In *Around the Neighborhood*, we acknowledge that we are made whole not in a vacuum, but in particular places with characteristics that influence the way we act and move in the world. Our mantra for integrity goes to the deep, difficult place of recovering our self-respect after doing something that causes harm. Two Extra Mile projects offer ways to take integrity a bit further--building strong bridges out of fragile pieces and using breath to witness our connection to all of creation.

Parenting challenges our integrity. Our children “push our buttons,” bringing up parts of our past that we have yet to integrate; the physical demands of caring for another can make us weary and worn down, difficult states from which to act as our best selves; we discover we are wholly unprepared for some contingencies, in situations we never thought we’d be in, saying and doing things we never imagined.

It is not an understatement to say that the future of our movement, our communities, our nations, our planet depend on our ability to live as a people of integrity, a people who value doing the right thing and do the hard work to figure out what that is. Of course, this effort begins in our families. We are with you this month as we turn over a new decade, as we face old and new challenges together.

Yours in faith, and in our shared pursuit of love and justice,

Teresa, on behalf of the whole Soul Matters team



At the Table

Exploring Integrity 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.

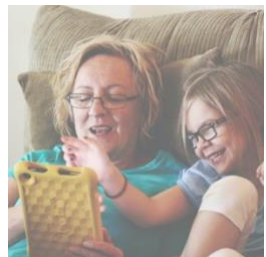
Introducing the Activity

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.

1. Is it more important to be right, or kind?
2. Would you rather have friends who are always sure they are right, or who can't make up their minds?
3. Whom do you know who always does the right thing?
4. On a scale from 1 to 10, how easy is it to be honest with your friends?
5. Who taught you the most about being true to your word, or following through on what you say you're going to do?
6. Do you remember your first lie? How did it feel and what did it teach you?
7. Who in your life is most "themselves"? In other words, who is least afraid to be who they are?
8. What is one action that is always wrong? What is one action that is always right?
9. What face do you make when you are about to do something that you know or suspect is wrong?
10. Around whom in your life are you free to be your most complete self?
11. How are you different from what other people think of you?
12. What is one thing you hope is always true about you?
13. What are the three most important pieces of you?
14. Where is a place where all of you is accepted, where you don't have to hide any part of yourself?

Ways to 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 that 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

A Treasure Hunt for Integrity: The Places that Make Us

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. Take our monthly treasure hunt list with you on your trips to the grocery, walks around the neighborhood or bike rides, and transform your everyday travel into a family adventure.

Introducing This Month's Hunt

The places in our neighborhoods have profound impacts on how our integrity (values and wholeness) develops, even if that influence seems invisible while we're living there. So in this month's Treasure Hunt, we've listed below various types of places that shape us. Your family's task is to name as many places you can think of under each type. It's all a way of acknowledging that our integrity is not built alone, but in our communities of familiar people and places. In your travels around your neighborhood during the month, pay special attention to these places you named--they are places where you and your family are being formed!

Name as many places as you can where...

- your family buys good and nourishing food for your meals:
- you like to go to celebrate special occasions
- you learn interesting things:
- you meet up with people who affirm you:
- you gather with others to show your government what you want to be happening in your community and our shared world
- you play, move your body in the sunshine, and deepen your connection to the natural world:
- there are people being kind to animals:
- people help each other feel joyful:
- you get to learn about people different than you:
- you get a chance to help people who need support:



At Play

Playing Games with Integrity

At Play activities and questions are a way to joyfully, playfully, and imaginatively experience the theme. We offer a brief framework to introduce the game and another to reflect upon it, so that the insights learned in play can stay with us throughout the month and beyond.

Option A: Solitaire: Being Complete in Ourselves

A popular adage about integrity is a quote by author C.S. Lewis: “Integrity is doing the right thing, even when no one is watching.” Our kids need practice with this kind of integrity, and they can do this by getting more comfortable with alone time and choosing solo games and challenges.

Before you introduce one of these activities, share some thoughts about following the rules of the game even though there are no other players. While no one else would know that we cheated, our own sense of accomplishment would be diminished, and we’d be denying ourselves that really lovely feeling of growing mastery as we got better with practice and effort.

There are actually many versions of one-player/one-deck card games, any of which might be called solitaire. One that we found fun and accessible to younger players is called “Pyramid.” Video instructions can be found here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Deyy_aoMHrc

Some card games are specifically designed as single-players, with goals including completing journeys or building things. A list of suggestions is here:

<https://lifehacker.com/board-games-that-are-super-fun-to-play-solo-1770363470>

Inexpensive toys designed for one player include the triangle peg game (made popular by the kitschy, roadside restaurant, Cracker Barrel), paddle ball, ball-and-cup, and Rubix Cubes.

And while we know our children often make their own fun in active ways, here’s a description of some activities that you might want to suggest:

<https://www.verywellfamily.com/games-for-kids-to-play-alone-1256807>

It can be fun, too, to compare best scores, times, outcomes, etc. for games such as these, so you are supporting the value of solo time as a family and reinforcing the idea of the value of integrity and honesty in play. (In my own family, my partner and oldest child have a standing competition for best Minesweeper scores.) In a quiet moment after playing, ask your child how it was to spend time alone.

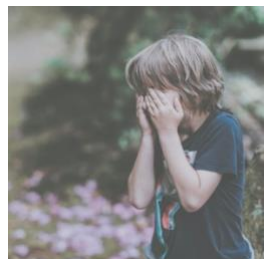


Option B: Integrity as Honesty and Cooperation in Ghost in the Graveyard

Ghost in the Graveyard is a variation of outside hide-and-seek that requires the balancing of personal motives and ethics. One person who is IT, the ghost, hides, and the rest of the group counts to 30 (or 50, depending on the size of your playing area, and age of the players). When the seekers call out, "Ready or not, here we come!", they fan out, attempting to find the hider, the ghost. The first one to find the ghost yells, "Ghost in the graveyard!" and is immune to being tagged. Upon hearing the yell, the ghost jumps out and begins chasing the seekers to tag one, as the seekers attempt to get back to base. Whomever is tagged first becomes the ghost for the next game. If no one is tagged, the ghost hides again.

There's a degree of honesty and trust needed to play this game, because if someone suspects they are close to the ghost's hiding spot, but doesn't quite see them, they could yell out, flush out the ghost, and then be immune from being tagged. Of course, this quickly makes it no fun for the other players. So, before you begin, have a talk about the integrity of playing by the rules. If someone accidentally or intentionally calls out "Ghost in the graveyard!" you might want to issue a do-over or make that person IT, as the ghost for next round.

Check in with the group after the game to see how well they thought they did together.



On the Message Board

A Monthly Mantra

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.

January’s Mantra:

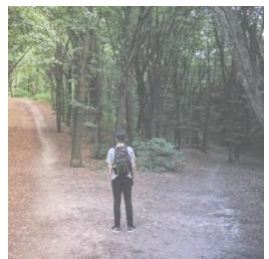
“Make the next decision a good one.”

Each of us builds our own character by the actions we take in the world. And, most of us would say that we strive to be good people. Yet, we know that we regularly say and do things that take us further from good character. We sometimes act petty, selfish, entitled, impulsive, aggressive, hurtful, etc. We want one thing, and we do another. How do we reconcile these two realities?

Our mantra this month is designed to be used when the chasm between the people we want to be and the way we are conducting ourselves in the world seems pretty big. Did your child betray a friend? Let down their fellow learners in a group project? Quit a team out of frustration? Hurt a sibling? Mistreat a pet? Personal disappointments such as these have a strong sting, for both the doer and receiver of the action!

When you are processing a less-than-stellar personal action together with your child, try and identify the moment when the damage that their action has caused has been realized, but before there is too much wallowing, or before they lose interest. At that point, remind your child that from a neurological point of view, *we actually learn more--we make stronger connections in our brain--when we recognize and correct mistakes than if we had done the right thing the first time.* So a mistake is an opportunity for a really powerful new understanding. This is the essence of a growth mindset.

There are two components to offering this mantra. First, acknowledge the wrongdoing and practice crafting [a good apology](#). But make it clear that doing something that necessitates an apology does not make someone a bad person. Instead, we have the power to “make the next decision a good one” in order to restore our faith in ourselves. We want our children to know that they can make themselves into the kind of person they want to be--a person with integrity--with every decision they make, including the decisions to right their own wrongs.



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.

Integrity in Action: The Wise Teacher's Test

This story deals in perhaps the most straightforward aspect of integrity--doing the right thing, even when it's hard to do so. The gist of it is that a teacher tries to convince his students to act unethically for a greater good, as a test to see whether their consciences will call them to disobey such an assignment. It's a fast and compelling story with a timeless dilemma for children of all ages, and adults, too.

Here is the story, from the UUA Tapestry of Faith curriculum Moral Tales, by [Alice Anacheka-Nasemann](#) and [Elisa Davy Pearmain](#):

<https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/tales/session2/story1>

If you're up for something a little different, you might practice acting out the story with props that you animate as you go along--one figure for the teacher, a few more for the students, a building of sorts for the school, a large rock, and a purse or bag of money. Toys grabbed from the shelf or toybox work just fine.

After reading, your child might bring up their own questions. Here are a few you might prompt with:

- If you had been the one student in this story who stayed in the school building, do you think you would have done the same thing?
- How do you think the other students felt? What might they have said to each other as they waited behind the rock?
- Do grown-ups always know what's right and wrong? Do they always tell the truth?
- Is it ever OK for someone who does not have enough to take something from someone who has more than enough?
- Was the teacher's test fair? Did it work? Do you think it was a good way to teach the pupils about right and wrong?

Parent, you might call to mind a story of a time that you did or didn't do the right thing, when your own conscience was speaking to you, and you made a decision about whether to follow that voice or not--a real moment of choice.



On the Porch

Raising a Child of Integrity Together

On the Porch supports sharing realizations, challenges and hopes around the theme with other supportive adults. It connects parents with their co-parents, with their close circle of supporters, with extended family or whomever they turn to for love and fellowship. Perhaps this happens on a literal porch or front stoop, but it could happen wherever parents and their circle of support gather and talk over the soulful parts of parenthood.

A Sip of Something More

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. So as you head to the porch with your parenting companion, don’t just bring your usual cup of coffee or tea; also take with you this additional “conversation partner”:

The Integrity of Holding All of Our Names

Names can be tricky in families. Parents may or may not share surnames with one another. Children may or may not share surnames with parents, or with each other. Within our families, we may choose the names we’re called, or we may not be free to do that. And all of these scenarios come with others’ assumptions about us. Names don’t make families. Love makes families. And, the names we’re given aren’t the only names we have or can claim.

This Sip of Something More is adapted from our Soul Matters small group packet for this month. Read this poem together, written in 1985 by Israeli poet Zelda, translated from Hebrew:

<https://www.poetryinternational.org/pi/poem/3275/auto/0/0/Zelda/EACH-OF-US-HAS-A-NAME/en/list>

Zelda offers the possibility that, like the different facets of a crystal, each name we’re given or that we take both reflects and offers a view into various aspects of us. When all of these facets are taken together, we get closer to describing our integrity, the true form of our selves at this place and time.

As you slowly read the poem line by line, with your parenting partner, make space for each of you to consider the aspects of self that Zelda asks you to consider. Consider, too, what name you were given...

...by your parenting

...by your faith

...by your commitments

After reading the poem aloud, and considering the additional names above, share a few of the names that came to you as you listened. Share, too, how some of those names felt to say out loud.



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.

Who were you, before you were socialized by your family of origin/ social circle/ culture to speak, look, and act in the acceptable ways?

What have you said or done recently that you never thought you would?

Who was the first person you “really admired”? The first “person of character” in your life? How did they rub off on you?

When you’ve stepped off the path of the person you want to be, has a character or scene from a book or movie ever helped you right your way?

What TV character most shaped your integrity growing up? (First see if your partner can guess the correct answer)

Do you remember what your 18 year old self dreamed you’d be?

What three virtues do you hope your children embody as they navigate childhood and teen years? How about their adult years? How do you imagine their three values might change over that time?

Which of society’s lies was the hardest for you to shake off: “You are what you have,” “You are what you do” or “You are what other people say or think about 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. 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!

Structural Integrity: Craft Stick Bridges

Don't wait for this cool science activity to come around in your child's school or homeschool curriculum--get in on the fun and set up a bridge-building challenge around your kitchen table! Can you create a bridge together out of glue and Popsicle sticks that will hold 5 lbs.? 10 lbs.? 20 or more lbs.?!

A tried-and-true design is shown here:

<https://www.wikihow.com/Build-a-Bridge-with-Popsicle-Sticks>

Some fun pictures of families testing their bridges are shown here:

<https://www.garrettsbridges.com/building/how-to-build-a-popsicle-stick-bridge/>

But half the fun is riffing on this good idea. You could use a bridge in your own town as an inspiration, or a famous bridge. Remark together on how each piece of your bridge has a place in creating whatever strength you are able to achieve; similarly, our strength and integrity as a people depends on each of us.

On that note, if you want to take this “two extra miles,” you could pass out 5 popsicle sticks to all the family members and have them write one value on each that makes them special. Then mix everyone's sticks in with the bigger pile. While building the bridge, the family members will stumble on these personalized sticks. You can use these moments to guess whose stick it is or to talk about how you as a family have overlapping or entirely individualized values.



Tip-of-Your-Nose Meditation

One of the ways to observe integrity of spirit and body is through the breath and focusing one's attention on breath may be one of our oldest meditations. Consider this guided meditation for younger and older children alike:

"Lay down so that you're comfortable.

Can you imagine the two little openings at the end of your nose, your nostrils? Can you picture the air moving in and out of your nostrils? In, out, in, out.

Maybe the air has a smell today. Maybe you can feel the tiny hairs in your nose twitch when the air passes over them.

Notice how the air that goes in your nose is different from the air that comes out. The air that goes in is cool. (Pause here for a breath or two.) The air that comes out is warm. (Pause here for a breath or two.)

The air that you breathe in is the same air that was breathed by giant sloths and tiny prehistoric horses.

The air that you breathe out is the same air that was breathed by the very first flowers, 140 millions years ago.

Breath is the first thing we all do when we're born, and it's the last thing any of us do before we die. Your breath is part of your body, and its part of the beautiful blue earth that we share with billions of people and trillions of other creatures, big and small.

Any time that you like, you can imagine the tip of your nose, and focus on your breath, in and out, in and out. When you do this, you can remember how you are part of the interconnected web of all existence, how your body and breath are linked to everything that ever was, and everything that ever will be.



Blessing

Parents of faith, bless you and thank you for your magnificent effort to raise noble, caring, whole children. Know that we, all of us, benefit from your undertaking, and share this task with you, for you are creating tomorrow's society in the hearts and minds of today's youth. May your stores of moral courage, forgiveness, compassion, creativity, and humor be rich and sustaining. And should they run short, may you remember that there is a community of integrity surrounding you, offering you its support and nourishment. May we all open and let that nourishment in. And, in return, may we pass it on to each other.

Love,
Teresa



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
Teresa Honey Youngblood,
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Learn more about subscribing
to these monthly resource packets on our website:
<https://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com/soulful-home.html>



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