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# PRACTICING SABBATH WITH YOUR CHILDREN

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## Raising Human Beings, Not Human Doings

### The “What?” and “Why?” of Practicing Sabbath with your Children

from Kerri Meyer, Director of Religious Education

A Sabbath for religious liberal families can take many forms, both echoing and departing from the most common definitions of a day of rest. Some families have a weekly Family Day of special activities – friends may join the family, but no one may be missing. For other families, Sabbath means a day off-limits to outside obligations: no sports, no meetings, no classes. Sabbath means church and volunteer service to others. Many families set their Sabbath apart by limiting technology’s invasion into their day: no TV, no internet, no cell phone, no texting. Rituals such as candle lighting, reading aloud, and sharing joys and sorrows can bring members of the family into intimate moments. Any family can make their Sabbath restful by sharing preparation of hassle-free meals, by enjoying nature and being outdoors, and by choosing simple, inexpensive ways to spend time together. The simplest definition is among the oldest: honor the Sabbath day and keep it holy. That’s doable, no matter how we find and keep that which is holy.

Your family’s Sabbath commitments may be radically different from other religious families’, but no matter how you choose to scale back, simplify and rest, the practice of Sabbath is worthwhile. Why?

1. Religious practice is caught, not taught. What you do and say in your own home shapes your child’s spiritual identity. If the spiritual need for rest becomes important to you, it will forever have importance for your child.
2. Busy isn’t better. Research indicates that extra educational experiences don’t necessarily create better learners.
3. Kids’ brains need downtime to develop. The American Academy of Pediatrics has confirmed the need for unstructured time and play for normal mental and social development. Our kids’ neurons need a break from the regular routine to build the patterns that help them integrate their learning and experiences.
4. The schedules we impose on our kids can actually be displaced by peer pressure we feel from other parents. If we ask the deep “why?” questions about our choices around time and commitment, we often find that the motivation is not found within, but outside us.
5. Choosing to eliminate activities from a given day teaches children the skill of prioritizing. In spite of media messages to the contrary, we can’t ever have it all. The decision to drop a sport in favor of family or church activities is hard to make, but the process models the application of our values to our actions.
6. When we take a break from our own busyness, we are better able to be present to our kids. Isn’t it easier to be patient and attentive when you aren’t faced with checklists or appointments?
7. Boredom is a catalyst for creativity. When the usual stream of constant input from the usual sources (TV, computer, classes) is cut off, kids and parents have to employ their own imagination to fill the time.
8. Sabbath is ecologically friendly. A day free of unnecessary travel or low on consumption of goods is gentle on the interdependent web of all existence. A day outdoors reconnects our children with the natural systems that surround and sustain us.
9. Sometimes, millennia of religious experience can be spot on. We imagine Sabbath to be the domain of the Judeo-Christian tradition, but in fact, every major religious tradition calls for days, weeks and even years devoted to rest and contemplation of matters holy. Surely the parents of all the world’s faiths across the centuries can’t all be wrong.
10. The overscheduled life is our faith’s very own social justice issue. In his article for *UU World* (May 2004), Unity member and family therapist Bill Doherty, PhD, frames overbusyness as a spiritual and social justice crisis and asserts that Unitarian Universalists are not merely the victims of this crisis, but its agents. UUs “are a largely middle-to upper-middle-class denomination, and our social class group leads the way in the social pathologies of overwork and overscheduling.

We don’t need to despair at the difficulty of finding a place for Sabbath in our pathologically busy society. Bill writes on, reminding us that our hope also comes from who we are as religious liberals:

“...we have a rich Unitarian Universalist tradition of challenging the blind spots in ourselves and the larger society. We have the spiritual and community resources to tackle this new problem. The beginning of social change is to name a problem that has had no name, and to say that it doesn’t have to be this way. We do not have to live time-starved lives, and neither do our children.”

Practice Sabbath with your children.

### Summer Sundays

On Sundays during the summer, children and adult volunteers will be in our Children’s Garden with Anna Newton. Registration is not necessary, but Safe Church ratios will limit the number of kids we can take with us into the garden.

If you’d like to volunteer to garden or to help tend the garden between Sundays, contact Kerri at the Church Office.