



Leader's Guide

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Welcome!	2
Section One: Art of Ethics Child-led Approach	3
Section Two: Participation in Art of Ethics	6
Who can participate in Art of Ethics?	6
When and where is the Art of Ethics project happening?	6
What does a leader or interested adult do to facilitate participation?	6
Can I adapt this to an online community?	7
Section Three: What Role Does Religion Have in Art of Ethics?	8
Interfaith Engagement	8
Christian Community Expressions	9
Section Four: More on Ethics as Co-Creativity	11
Section Five: Resources	16
Additional curricular ideas	16
Gather	16
Wonder	18
Engage	18
Create	18
Bibliography	19
Storybooks	19
Childhood Studies	19
Religious and Theological Research	20

Welcome!

The leader guide details the educational approach behind the Arts of Ethics project to help prepare leaders as they make space for participants' creativity. Conversations on ethics and values usually start with adults. We want to change that. Not because we have some simplistic vision about "the children as our future" or "child-like understandings." Not at all. We believe the opposite. Children and youth are not naïve to the daily survival and thriving of their families, communities, and the planet. They respond to it and generate new possibilities in the process. Using moral imagination requires us to be aware of current realities and seek a new vision. Children participate in constructing their worlds in and through the relationships around them, first with family and then with friends, broadening out as they meet new people. Play and artistic expression is one way that children "do ethics." The practice of play, storytelling, and art provides the forum for moral imagination to contribute to self-transformation and world-making.

In addition to the 'what' and 'how' of Art of Ethics, we provide pull-outs on key vocabulary, tell you a bit more about the Stead Center, get nerdy about the scholarship, and share resources in addition to the downloadable age and community-specific curriculum examples. The Leader's guide has five sections.

Section One: Art of Ethics Child-led Approach

The Art of Ethics project seeks to engage the moral imagination of children and youth. We invite adult leaders, teachers, and caregivers to join children and youth in envisioning a better world through visual and language arts.

Children are simultaneously changing the world, living in the world, and making meaning as part of the world. This playful arena is where they develop their sense of ethics. For some, there is a clear understanding of right and wrong. For others, there exists a gray area, an awareness of how context, community, and weight of concerns shape ethics for specific times and places. Each lesson offers multiple ways for children to explore and display their ethics. We encourage you to tailor the lessons to align with your children's needs, talents, and passions.

Art of Ethics is an interconnected, child-led approach to identity, meaning-making, and defining ethics. It relies on a circular and equitable approach instead of a linear and hierarchical approach. Ethicist John Wall, who coined the term *childism*, affirms children as *disrupters*,

Disruption: Play's natural outcome challenging us with new ideas, aiding identity formation. Ex: An upside rainbow showing the beauty in dyslexia.

“markers of social transformation in the direction of a more inclusive love and hope.”¹ When we use the term disruption, we are not describing children who do not listen, get wild, or create havoc. Though, we do think children need opportunities to be goofy, wiggle, and express their energy and feelings in ways that uniquely fit them. We mean that children's questions and their play often disrupt the ways adults and institutions organize our lives. As Hannah Dyer says, “the act of playing can alter affective capacities for reparation.”² Play disrupts the present for a bold future. It breaks convention for

¹ John Wall, “Human Rights in Light of Children,” *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 17, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 55.

² Hannah Dyer, *The Queer Aesthetics of Childhood: Asymmetries of Innocence and the Cultural Politics of Child Development* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2020), 40.

the unconventional, the breaking through. These disruptions offer opportunities to re-think how well our communities live out inclusive love and hope.

Art of Ethics seeks to create spaces that become “shared worlds of meaning” for children and youth to express their existing ethics through play and creativity.³ These activities offer a space for all ages to test, retest, consider, and play. In Art of Ethics, children illuminate their values and those of their communities.

Childism:

Empowering children to access their inherent fullness and agency as creative beings to alter community ethics. Ex: Greta Thunberg’s ecological allyship.

As Art of Ethics leaders, the goal is to build a creative space with its own flow. Don’t give answers. Offer *space*. Offer a joyful presence amid creative messiness. This might feel uncomfortable. Questioning ethics can feel uncomfortable, especially in religious contexts where we might have previously learned it was wrong to question or doubt. However, questions, observation, and discernment are key factors for how we develop our ethics over time. We all learn ethics and values through interactions with others, whether through specific teachings,

Ethics: Who we ought to be (character) or how we ought to act based on beliefs and values. Ex: Advocating for someone to speak who has been harmed or silenced.

community rules and covenants, learning from a context completely different than our own, or considering the differences between values and behaviors across social institutions in which we participate, like school, church, work, family, and so on. Join in the conversations and be challenged. It helps everyone grow and contributes to a community of belonging. That’s what we are doing at the Stead Center by inviting young people to teach us how to define ethics.

These lessons offer adults glimpses into the very real, dynamic, and authentic lives and ethics of children as full participants in the world. By guiding these children in these lessons, you

³ Wall, “Human Rights in Light of Children,” 60, 61.

are creating a space where children’s playful expression will critique our world, inviting us all to unlearn, and assume their indispensable role in societal thriving. In Art of Ethics, children will teach us by exploring their values through play and creative expression in community.⁴ We invite you to ‘wonder in’ and ‘be thankful’ for their full participation.

We encourage you to recognize that participants might need permission to really let their creative juices flow – odds are, they’ve been operating in bounds for long enough. They, too, need to be reminded how they can and should create out of the box!

We appreciate your interest in the Art of Ethics project and are here to help. Feel free to email us at stead.center@garrett.edu with any questions you might have. The Leader’s Guide is only an introduction, and the online curricula are examples. We invite you to bring your own creative spin to this project. Thank you for your commitment to creating space for the creativity of children to lead us.

⁴ *The Spiritual Lives of Young African Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 226.

Section Two: Participation in Art of Ethics

Art of Ethics is an online art gallery featuring children's visual and language art contributions that reflect on how they understand ethics and values or what's right and wrong.

Who can participate in Art of Ethics?

We define children as anyone under the age of 18 and will only accept artwork from artists in this age group. Any child from any community can participate in Art of Ethics with the assistance of trusted adult leaders and caregivers. Children need caregivers and adult leaders to confirm that all parties understand that submissions will be posted publicly on the Stead Center website. Artists will be identified in relation to their submissions with their first name and age and a description of their work, if provided.

When and where is the Art of Ethics project happening?

The Art of Ethics project began in the summer of 2023 and will continue through the winter of 2024. It is a virtual art gallery with a fully online submission process. We may periodically open the project in the future for new contributions.

The Stead Center will host an on-campus art show in early February 2024 for any artists, families, and communities able to attend from the Chicagoland area. This is a celebration of the Art of Ethics project. It is not a required component to participate in Art of Ethics.

What does a leader or interested adult do to facilitate participation?

Interested adult leaders might be a caregiver, parent, community organizer, teacher, minister, and so forth. You have the unique opportunity to create the space and invitation for children in your

community to participate in Art of Ethics. Review the curricular guides ([online](#)) and review the educational approach ([section one of this guide](#)).

After the Art of Ethics creations are complete, submissions can be uploaded by individual caregivers, or the group leader can confirm adult consent and child assent to participation and upload submissions on behalf of individual caregivers and children. Please take a look at the submission pages; reach out to the Stead Center at stead.center@garrett.edu if you have any questions or need assistance with submissions.

Can I adapt this to an online community?

Organizations and communities have a growing online presence, and making Art of Ethics a part of that space involves a few simple shifts. We have created an online adaptation of our intergenerational curriculum for use via synchronous video conferencing. That curriculum is posted on the Stead Center [website](#).

Section Three: What Role Does Religion Have in Art of Ethics?

The Stead Center promotes teaching and research on ethics and values by providing a space for conversation and developing resources that enhance moral communities. We are an academic center that is part of Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary (G-ETS), a progressive Christian seminary founded in the Methodist tradition. While much of what we do at the Stead Center is with and for Christian communities, we also engage in interfaith conversations and have an interdisciplinary, collaborative approach that extends beyond religious partners. The Stead Center encourages thoughtful engagement by providing a wide range of social ethics resources accessible to a diverse audience. We are grounded in education, not evangelism, and seek to enhance moral communities by providing a space to engage, think critically, and ask questions about relevant, current, critical justice issues.

Interfaith Engagement

Part of what draws us to interfaith engagement is the innate connection we feel to all around us. There is a oneness to community whereby when one hurts, all hurt, and when another feels joy,

Integrating Spirituality:

Faith that empowers a people to wrestle with disparate parts of their lives, to assume their importance in the legacy of faith, and live abundantly.

all feel that exhilaration. This is indicative of a community ethic of care and interconnection – an ethic of solidarity.

What does this have to do with children and young people? In an interfaith ethic, it is our common humanity and connection to the

Sacred that binds us all, and children are no exception. They

navigate their connections to the Sacred through play. They find their place in and with the Sacred through one another.

Laughter, tears, toil, and play inspire all creatures daily to keep asking questions about who they are in relation to their worlds. Peace is manifest in a connected, creative tapestry *playing* in harmony. It breaks convention for the unconventional, the breaking through. Peacemaking is central to an interfaith and solidarity ethic and relates directly to play, disruption, connection, and re-creation. This type of play disrupts the present for a bold future. In *Art of Ethics*, we encourage leaders to allow the participants to guide themselves in these lessons, to connect their ideas to their family and community faith traditions, and to explore how learning from another child's faith tradition may reshape their own ideas about ethics and values.

Christian Community Expressions

What do ethics have to do with children and youth ministry? Well, they are theologians and ethicists in their own right. There is a practical theology, one of literal playfulness, toying with their questions and answers with each squish of clay and swipe of a paintbrush. Just as with God, this is a theology of action. God *played* creation into being, toying with new, creative ideas. God breathed life into the world, including laughter, joy, and our ability to play. Jesus *played*, answering questions with questions, expanding the bounds of friendship across ethnic and economic limits, and laughing with children. Jesus named children and young people full kin-dom⁵ participants, stunning his disciples, who told them to leave!

Jesus routinely chose the mess over the tidy. God is constantly editing, and a fiery Holy Spirit unites us in a multilingual, multiethnic tapestry! Life is rife with varied creatures coming together alongside someone who disrupted order for flourishing. God is a wonderer, a disrupter

⁵ This term is often attributed to Mujerista theologian and ethicist, Ada María Isasi-Díaz. The term is meant to provide a more community-based, inclusive understanding than the militaristic history of kingdoms. Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology : A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Maryknoll N.Y: Orbis Books), 1996.

who wants our full participation. God arrived as a child to live with us, disrupting our concept of liberation. Children's playfulness frees us for disruptive creating!

Play, disruption, and re-creation are tools of connection, solidarity, and salvation. Children and adults explore play in community.⁶ What if we reevaluated our assumptions about transgressing, *disruptive* kids as troublemakers and began viewing them as living prophets of social witness? They are holy troublemakers.⁷ That is to say, child disruption can be an opportunity for revival. Their indignation at inconsistencies in how adults put Christian values into action can be a roadmap for salvation. Remember, Jesus scolded his friends for siloing children away from the dialogue, away from the church. Children's spiritual development is an ongoing, institution-wide praxis that requires educational space to cultivate a disruptive, salvific, abundant community who *plays* together for the repair of creation.

⁶ Wright, *The Spiritual Lives of Young African Americans*, 226.

⁷ Wright, *The Spiritual Lives of Young African Americans*, 235.

Section Four: More on Ethics as Co-Creativity

Yes, we developed this idea for Art of Ethics, but not all on our own. It has a basis in a field of study called [Childism](#), as we mentioned in [section one](#). The Stead Center Director, [Dr. Kate Ott](#), notes that “the childist ethics approach significantly raises the profile of one of the most vulnerable and diverse segments of our population (children) as well as attending to an experience and state-of-being that all of us share (childhood).”⁸

Childism challenges historical ideas in philosophy, child development, education, and even religious traditions that purport that children do not understand ethics. We think society and all these academic fields of study would understand ethics better if we spent more time hearing directly from children. Dr. Ott reminds us not to romanticize children “as exempt from or affected by evil. And still, children lead rich moral lives that highlight imagination as moral response.”⁹ The field of ethics and our communities can learn a great deal from a childist perspective.

Play: A disruptive, curious tool that suspends the present so we’re free and resourced to build unincumbered, flourishing futures. Ex: Using sock puppets to act out a dilemma or communicate feelings.

Children are the “heroes of their own lives” and ours.¹⁰ We call them the future, but they are affective and effective here and now. They are morally courageous agents of change, seeking to repair the planet, their people, and their communities. They can also do harm to themselves and others, similar to any person with moral agency. They clamor for spaces fully open *to and for* their collaborative insight.¹¹ When we foster a community of practice, offering

⁸ Kate Ott, “Taking Children’s Moral Lives Seriously: Creativity as Ethical Response Offline and Online,” *Religions* 10, no. 9 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10090525>.

⁹ Ott, “Taking Children’s Moral Lives Seriously,” 2019.

¹⁰ Nolan Fewell, *The Children of Israel*, 112.

¹¹ Marcia Bunge, *Child Theology: Diverse Methods and Global Perspectives* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2021), 102.

meaning-making through increased access, the world changes. As they push against norms, children develop what Almeda Wright calls critical consciousness, forming voice, identity, and agency in relationship *with and as* the community. If we don't embrace children's formation and the disruptions it may cause, they can identify as excluded from a community and consider it pretentious or phony. We must empower them to explore their identity in community, equipped and intrigued for discovery. Dr. Ott reminds us that "whether we focus on practices like improvisation, play, storytelling, or art, imagination is core to a moral response. The role of imagination is central in responding to otherness as each person and community presents itself anew."¹² Moral imagination helps each of us make community, relationships, and develop our sense of selves anew as we face interpersonal, familial, community, and global challenges.

Where do ethics happen in children's lives? How is their moral imagination sparked? They often use play to work out their ideas about each other and the world around them. Adults do this too, but we call it things like work, school, and household management! Children actively participate in and alter their world. Wall notes that children don't simply receive input and recite what they're given. They uncover knowledge through marvel and wonder. Instead of needing to become creative beings children already are.¹³ They discover their identities socially, through connection, curiosity, and *play*. Play is not just a game of tag or a watercolor project to pass the time on a rainy day. Play is an interconnected, curious tool that disrupts realities for possibilities, discoveries, and meaning.

Learning: A dynamic process of meaning-making; curiously working out knowledge and identity relationally. Ex: Playing house, store, or building a tower with friends.

¹² Ott, 2019.

¹³ John Wall, "From Childhood Studies to Childism: Reconstructing the Scholarly and Social Imaginations," *Children's Geographies* 20, no. 3 (September, 2019): 2. <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://johnwall.camden.rutgers.edu/files/Wall-From-Childhood-Studies-to-Childism.pdf> (accessed April 1, 2023).

Allowing children to play brings creativity into being. As educators charged with fomenting spiritual curiosity, we must disrupt stagnant education models if we desire authentic, empowered children and an invigorated, interconnected world. Community is unsustainable without disruption, without play. Traditional educational models focus on retention, deciding what facts a child needs to learn and then crafting lessons to pour those facts into them. Education here offers certainty, *order*. Lessons are systematic: gather, listen, respond, and create a craft to cement the lesson in the child. With each, “What did you learn today?” inquiry, we implicitly tell children that proper recall is intelligence. Lessons are designed to keep children from boredom, fixated on the new, shiny, and entertaining. Education scholar Joyce Mercer says this method defines success as fitting well “with these and other forms and practices of consumerism.”¹⁴

In many educational settings, we work off the theory that if we keep children interested, they’ll remember. They’ll pay attention. We’ll keep control. Disruption, then, is antithetical to success, an undeserving enemy of *learning*. Learning oddly partners with order, packing lessons with stimulating activities, videos, and crafts to avoid “extra time.” Lessons require memorization amid constant motion, with precious little time for wonder, much less making meaning. It’s possible that our busy lessons actually produce boredom!

Yet, this isn’t humanity’s story. Ours is a story of creativity and innovation. Growth is messy, not clean. Children’s playfulness makes room for wise, liberative, messy creating. Play, disruption, and re-creation are tools of connection, solidarity, and growth.

As educators looking to guide children to meaning, we have to do the work of *disruption*. Education comes from the Latin word *educatum*, meaning to draw out. Curriculum means

¹⁴ Joyce Ann Mercer, *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood* (Des Peres, MO: Chalice Press, 2005), 167.

running the path. Learning, then, is the discovery of what is within us, not external to us.

Children learn by meaning-making, negotiating, and toying with identity in social spaces.¹⁵

When a lesson gets stale, we could just change out the activity. Or, we could disrupt the entire education model and play *with* children. An interconnected, playful children's education model inspires authentic, alive, child-like discovery. It relishes in humanity's dynamism, something children often innately navigate in a world of continual movement.

Disruption takes *practice*. It takes adults being comfortable with discomfort. We say we value children. Are we including them equitably? Do we practice our values? Danna Nolan Fewell argues we don't "respect the moral intelligence of children or their astute observations and their critical, sometimes painful, experiences of the 'wrongs' of society."¹⁶ In truth, educational practices can divorce ethics from the classroom.

Practice: Repeated, intentional, disruptive play across all ages in a community toward new, interconnected, reparative possibilities. Ex: Actively listening when you don't like another's ideas.

Life Abundant: A life worth living as a full community participant empowered to restore oneself and one another. Ex: children sitting and voting on the school board.

Children are ethical beings, illuminating their and our values. Yet, we tell them what is *right*, and set them back *on track* if they draw conclusions too uncomfortable for us.

Educational spaces that embrace play contribute to flourishing communities. This can lead to what Wright calls "life abundant."¹⁷

Abundant living requires individuals and communities to pay attention to social differences that can lead to inequality. True abundance does not come at the expense of withholding economic, educational, environmental, gender, or racial justice from some in favor

¹⁵ Mercer, *Welcoming Children*, 167.

¹⁶ Danna Nolan Fewell, *The Children of Israel: Reading the Bible for the Sake of Our Children* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 107.

¹⁷ Almeda Wright, *The Spiritual Lives of Young African Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 202.

of another group. Collaboration and sharing are hallmarks of abundant living, as is the joy that comes from the celebration of our differences to the benefit of the community. Children participate in injustice and disrupt oppression. Children, like all people, have the capacity to do great good as well as contribute to harm in their communities. Children do not need to be the world's saviors. However, our communities and society need their equal and shared participation for abundant living.

Section Five: Resources

Additional curricular ideas

Sample curriculum for Art of Ethics is available in a free, downloadable format for ages pre-K through high school. Those materials can be found at <https://www.steadcenter.com/curriculum/>.

The curriculum contain ideas for each age group, online and offline use, as well as different religious and secular contexts.

This section of the Leader's Guide offers additional curricular ideas that span age groups, **as an on-going part of the guide which will be updated as we develop and receive suggestions.** We'd also like to hear from you. If you develop new ideas or approaches for Art of Ethics, please share them with us at stead.center@garrett.edu, and we can add them to this guide. We will include any identifying information you would like, such as your name, organization, and what type of group you lead. For that reason, this section of the guide will be continually updated.

The additional curricular ideas are divided into the primary sections that organize our curriculum which includes:

- ❖ GATHER: gathering exercises like welcome, mindfulness, introductions, or ground rules
- ❖ WONDER: opportunities for wonder as to what ethics means, how it is defined, and so forth
- ❖ ENGAGE: options for how to engage your group in discussion and learning
- ❖ CREATE: examples of creative processes to develop visual and language art contributions to Art of Ethics.

Gather

Simple Breathing Exercise:

Ask those in the circle to adopt any position of rest that feels comfortable. Ask for quiet and then guide them through a series of three deep breaths.

Consider saying: “Now we will take a moment to rest and prepare ourselves for the time we’ll spend together. Please sit up straight, placing the soles of your feet flat on the ground. Gently place your hands on the tops of the thighs. Close your eyes, and take a deep breath in, (pause to breathe) and out (pause to breathe). *repeat 3xs or up to 5xs*

Imagine a river:

Ask those in the circle to adopt any position of rest that feels comfortable. Ask for quiet and then guide them through imagining sitting beside a river while they take a series of three deep breaths.

Consider saying: “Now we will take a moment to rest and prepare ourselves for the time we’ll spend together. Please sit up straight, placing the soles of your feet flat on the ground. Gently place your hands on the tops of the thighs. Close your eyes, and take a deep breath in (pause to breathe) and out (pause to breathe). Keep taking slow deep breaths, and while you do, imagine you are in a forest, and in that forest, there is a stream (pause to breathe). And beside that stream is a bench, and that is where you sit (pause to breathe). While you sit and a thought comes to mind, imagine that thought as a leaf in the stream (pause to breathe). You see it there, but it floats away from you and down the stream (pause to breathe). Again, deep breath in (pause to breathe), and out (pause to breathe).

Blowing a Bubble:

Ask those in the circle to adopt any position of rest that feels comfortable. Ask for quiet and then guide them to blow bubbles.

Consider saying: “Now we will take a moment to rest and prepare ourselves for the time we’ll spend together. Please sit up straight, placing the soles of your feet flat on the ground. Today we are going to pretend to make bubbles. But this time, we don’t want to make small bubbles. We want to pretend to make big bubbles. First, we need to make a bubble wand. So, take one of your hands or use both of your hands to make a circle like mine. Now hold that circle up to your mouth. To make a big bubble, we’re going to need to take a deep breath. So do that with me. Take a deep breath in (pause to breathe). Keep breathing in until you can’t anymore. All right, you’re all full of air, right? Now blow that bubble (pause to breathe). Whoa, some of you blew some big bubbles, but you know, it’s important that we don’t blow too hard. Otherwise, our bubbles will pop. And remember, we want to make big bubbles. This time when you blow your bubble, I want you to breathe out slower. Like this (demonstrate a slow breath out). Okay,

everyone hold up your bubble wand. Take a deep breath in...and now nice and slow breath out. Good job, one more time. Breathe in...and breathe out.

Wonder

Engage

Create

Community Mural or Wall Art:

Many cities feature artistic murals. Participants might choose to depict their idea of a 'just world' or solving a social problem like climate change, racism, hunger, poverty, gun violence, bullying, clean parks, etc. For example, Ryan Tova Katz, a muralist in the Chicago area, focuses on images of children and their artistic imagination: <https://ryantovakatz.com/>.

Have participants, individually or in a group, design a mural for their community that shows what they care about or the kind of world they want to live in.

Worksheets:

Designed spaces and situations where there is no designated leader present or for participants that need a more accessible medium. Print some or all the worksheets and put them out for participants. Print the instructions and hang them prominently in the space where they will create.

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***Additional storybooks can be found in the [online curriculum](#) as well.

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