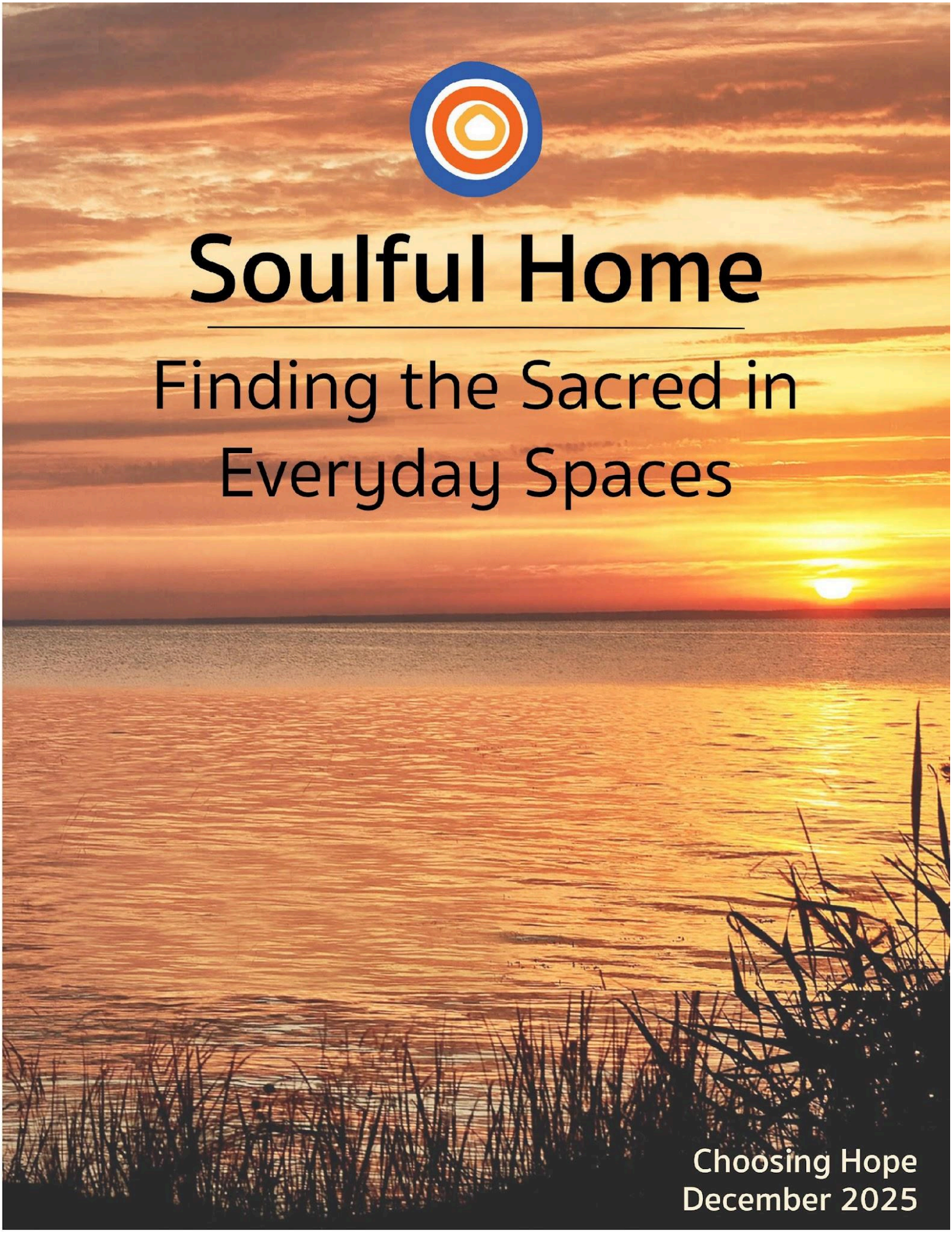

Soulful Home
Finding the Sacred in Everyday Spaces
Choosing Hope
December 2025

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The Welcome Mat

What Does it Mean to be a Family of Hope?

There were many aspects of parenting that I was prepared for, or at least thought I was prepared for. But let's be honest, as much as I thought I knew, there was at least three times as much that I didn't.

At the top of that list was the number of choices I would have to make in a day—some small, some huge, some that seemed silly at the time but felt monumental in the moment. Should we wear rain boots or sneakers? Do we need a snack now, or can we wait until lunch? Do I answer with patience, or do I breathe and try again?

Over time, I realized that many of these choices weren't just about logistics; they were opportunities. Opportunities to model kindness, patience, courage, and, most importantly, hope. For example, I can't tell you how many times I chose to spend the 10 minutes standing next to my toddler's booster seat as they buckled themselves in instead of insisting on doing it myself and saving 9 minutes and 57 seconds. This was a choice to model patience. Or the times I took a deep breath before responding to a hard question or a big emotion — choosing to listen instead of lecture. That was a choice to model compassion and trust. Or the mornings when I showed up with a smile, even after a rough night, to remind my kids (and myself) that each new day brings the possibility of something better — a quiet act of choosing hope.

All of which serve as a reminder that hope isn't just a feeling…Hope is a choice. It's a practice, and it's something we can choose again and again as a family.

And as a family, choosing hope together can be both a gentle practice and a bold declaration. In the midst of busy days, unexpected challenges, and the small dramas of daily life, hope reminds us to notice the light, both in the world and in each other.

Choosing hope doesn't mean ignoring difficulty. It means seeing possibilities, nurturing courage, and believing that our actions, no matter how small, can make a difference. This month, I invite you to explore what it means to be a family that chooses hope as a living, breathing part of our family life.



Blessed be,

April

At the Table

Exploring Hope Through Discussions

The At the Table section engages the theme through question-driven family discussions. The questions are designed to be used at a family gathering, most often dinner, but also during a quiet moment in the living room, before a board game night, or while driving in the car. This section strengthens family bonds as members learn more about each other through evocative questions.

How To Go About It

The most straightforward approach is to have parents and/or caregivers read off the questions they believe will resonate most with family members, and then have everyone take turns answering. Another fun way to do this is to create a family question jar. To make this easier, we've listed all the questions below at the end of this packet with dotted lines you can cut along to make "question strips." You can then pull out the question jar and have family members choose a question/strip a few times each week.

Discussion Questions

1. What does hope feel like to you? Is it more like a light, a sound, a taste, or something else?
2. When was a time you almost gave up but didn't? What helped you hold on?
3. Who is someone you think of as hopeful? What do they do that shows it?
4. Can you remember a time when you helped someone else find hope? How did it feel?
5. When the world feels heavy, what gives you the strength to believe things can get better?
6. Do you think hope and courage are connected? How?
7. Do you think hope and humor are connected? How?
8. What stories, movies, or songs remind you that hope is real?
9. If hope were a color, what color would it be today? Would it ever change?
10. Has there ever been a time when you had to choose hope instead of just feeling it?
11. What small thing gives you hope right now? (Something in nature, a friend, a plan, a memory, etc.)
12. When have you seen hope grow out of something hard or unexpected?
13. If you could give someone who feels hopeless one gift, what would it be?
14. What's one tradition or ritual that helps your family stay hopeful?
15. Do you think hope is contagious? How can we share it with others?
16. Imagine it's a year from now — what are you hoping the world, or our family, will look like?



At Play

Playing With Hope as a Family

At Play suggests games, crafts, and activities to help families experience the theme through joy and fun.

This Month's Treasure Hunt – Choosing Hope All Month Long

Hope is not wishful thinking — it's a choice we make every day to notice goodness, to keep showing up, and to believe that love and courage can make a difference. This month's treasure hunt invites you to choose hope in many different ways through the holiday season.

Click on the link below for a month long list that will send you on a different treasure hunt for hope each day of December.

31 Days of Choosing Hope

Additional At Play Options

Option A: Holiday Caroling

Many folks find that singing and caroling are some of the best ways to remind people of the joy and hope that can be found during the winter holiday season. So why not gather up a group of family and friends and bring back the tradition of caroling? Pick out some of your favorite holiday songs, stop by a friend, family member, or neighbor's house, and share some hope and holiday spirit.

Option B: Family Game Night

Gather the family (and friends) for a fun game night! Soul Matters has heard from many sources that the following games will surely get everyone flexing their **Hope** muscles! So give them a try this month and see if you agree!

- **Candy Land -** The winter holidays are often filled with sweet treats, so gather the whole family around the table for a round (or two!) of Candy Land. This classic game reminds us that every path has twists and turns — some that move us forward and some that send us back — but we keep going with hope as our guide. As you play, notice how much hope it takes to keep journeying toward the finish, and how joyful it can be just to share the road with one another.
- **The Saran Wrap Ball Game -** This super-fun game leaves everyone smiling and going home with a small gift — but the real treasure is the laughter along the way. Make a giant ball of Saran Wrap with little prizes tucked inside. Each person unwraps the ball on their turn, hoping a surprise will fall out. To learn how to make and play, check out this link: Saran Wrap Ball Game Tutorial. As you play, talk about how hope can be like the gifts hidden in the layers — sometimes it takes patience and teamwork to uncover, but it's always there, waiting to be found.



- **Candy Cane “Spoons” —** This fast-paced game is full of laughter, surprises, and quick reflexes! You’ll need a deck of cards, 3+ players, and a pile of candy canes — one fewer than the number of people playing. Players pass cards, racing to collect four of a kind. Once someone does, they quietly grab a candy cane. When others notice, they grab too! The person left without one sits out, and the game continues until one winner remains. Watch how it’s played here: Candy Cane Spoons Game. As you play, notice how hope keeps everyone alert, ready, and engaged — trusting that even when things move fast, joy and connection can always be found in the moment.



At the Bedside and in the Book Nook

At The Bedside & In the Nook suggests books that help families engage with the monthly themes with their imagination. This story-centered section honors the unique way stories enrich our sense of what's possible, expand our empathy, and build our identities.

Little Mole Finds Hope by Glenys Nellist (suggested for kids 3-5)

When Little Mole is feeling sad in his dark, underground home, his mother shows him how to look for hope. He finds that signs of spring are everywhere, from the daffodil bulbs under the soil to the tiny buds on the branches above. Hope can be found--even in the darkest places.

Invitation to Connect: *Parents, ask your children where they find hope.*

Wisp: A Story of Hope by Zana Fraillon (suggested for kids 4-7)

"Idris is a child refugee, born into a world of tents and fences. He has known no other life than this. He has no memories of the world outside. Then the Wisp arrives, floating in on the evening breeze. Everyone who holds it finds their memories reawakened, their hopes of freedom reborn. But what about Idris, who has no memories? What will happen when he holds the magical Wisp?"

Invitation to Connect: *Parents, use this as an opportunity to ask your children about and to share your own "wisps" of hope. What are the little wisps of hope that help you feel brave, connected, or comforted?*

Squirrel's New Year's Resolution by Pat Miller(suggested for kids 4-7)

"Squirrel knows that New Year's Day is a great day for making resolutions! But what does it mean to make a resolution, anyway? As she makes visits around the forest, she learns about New Year's resolutions and helps her friends get started on theirs. If only she can think of a resolution of her very own."

I*nvitation to Connect:* *Parents, use this as an opportunity to talk with your kids about the hopes they have for the year to come.*

Fia and the Last Snow Deer by Eilish Fisher (suggested for kids 8-10)

"A powerful and beautiful tale set in snowy pre-historic Ireland, about hope, kindness and the power of friendship….Fia and her snow deer, Solas, have always had a powerful and unbreakable connection. But as Fia's village face a seemingly eternal winter, they turn their sights to Solas and an ancient prophecy that promises the return of sunlight and life, if the ultimate sacrifice is made . . .Refusing to allow the worst to happen, Fia and her cousin Mish run from the village with Solas, seeking out the Deer Mother - the mythical being who wakes the sun at the winter solstice and who might be their only hope. But the wilderness is harsh, and shadows lurk at every turn. Can they make it to the Deer Mother? And, if they do, what choices will Fia face to bring back the sun and save her village? "



Invitation to Connect: *Parents leave this book out for your kids as an opportunity to reflect on their own understanding of hope and friendship.*

In Front of the Screen

Watching Meaningful Movies Together

In Front of the Screen offers families ways to connect with the monthly theme and each other through movies and TV shows.

Bluey – "Chickenrat" (Season 1, Episode 46) (G)

In this episode, Bingo is on the verge of losing hope about finding her lost toy, Floppy. In the end, she finds it hidden in a place she never expected, restoring her hope.

Invitation to Connect: *After watching, talk about how it feels when hope can hide — and then return — in surprising places*

Rise of the Guardians (PG)

Snuggle up as a family and watch this fantastic story about hope as a force that keeps light and imagination alive, even when fear takes hold.

Invitation to Connect: *Parents, use this movie as an opportunity to talk with your kids about what gives them hope when they feel afraid or unsure.*

The Christmas Chronicles 2 (PG)

A heartwarming story and the next chapter in The Christmas Chronicles that reminds us that hope isn't just believing in magic — it's choosing to keep your heart open when things feel hard or uncertain.

Invitation to Connect: *Parents, use this movie as an opportunity to talk with your kids about how hope can return even after loss or change. Ask your family: What helps you feel hopeful when things don't go as planned? How do you remind each other of the goodness that's still here? You might even try making a "Hope List" together — small things that help your hearts feel light again.*

The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe (2005)(PG)

A wintry world of courage, sacrifice, and the return of hope after long darkness.

Invitation to Connect*: Parents, use this movie as an opportunity to have a family discussion about how hope can melt even the "coldest winter." Talk about how in Narnia, the land is trapped in endless winter — "always winter, and never Christmas" — until courage and love help spring return. Ask: When have you felt like things would never change, but then they did? What helped you keep believing that light and warmth would come back?*



In the Toolbox

Strategies to Help Our Kids and Ourselves Navigate the Complicated Stuff

In the Toolbox offers parents resources to better understand the well-established and newly emerging challenges of being a child today. It's all about equipping parents to be better guides and companions for their kids.

Resource One: Celebrating the Winter Holidays (as UUs)

https://www.uuworld.org/articles/celebrate-winter-holidays

Celebrating the winter holidays as Unitarian Universalists invites us to embrace hope, finding light, meaning, and connection in our traditions, values, and the love we share with one another.

"The holidays often intensify family pressures—and they can be even more difficult for Unitarian Universalist families if theological issues conflict with family traditions or needs….Unitarian Universalist parents have begun to rethink the ideas behind the winter holidays to make them particularly meaningful for their families."

Resource Two: Surviving December Holidays

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/video/item/surviving_the_holidays

Surviving the busy, sometimes overwhelming December holidays becomes easier when we choose hope, focusing on moments of connection, kindness, and presence rather than perfection or stress.

"If you are starting to feel overwhelmed by the December holidays, you aren't alone! In this quick video, Christine Carter gives three tips for making the holidays more meaningful than they are stressful."

Resource Three: Parenting as a Spiritual Practice

https://hereforyouforthem.com/blog/2019/8/8/teaching-kids-to-appreciate-dont-just-be-sad-its-over

Parenting as a spiritual practice invites us to choose hope each day, seeing in our children's growth and our shared struggles the opportunity to nurture resilience, courage, and possibility.

"A lot of things change when you have a kid. And I was startled to realize how much my way of thinking about spirituality, and my understanding of my Jewish spiritual practice, got rearranged when I became a mom for the first time. The deeper I got into it, the more I realized that my parenting was more influenced by Judaism than I realized, and that my taking the work of raising small kids seriously was also having a pretty big impact on my thinking about, and understanding of, Judaism itself. - Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg"

Resource Four: Hope Is A Strategy

https://impactparents.com/blog/complex-kids/hope-is-a-strategy/

Resource Five: Keys to Building Hope in Children: Part One

https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hope-today/201302/keys-to-building-hope-in-children-part-onehttps://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hope-today/201302/keys-to-building-hope-in-children-part-one



On the Porch

Connecting and Sharing Stories with <u>Your Village</u>

On the Porch uses thoughtful questions to open space for you and your parenting partners or parent/caregiver friends to connect more deeply with each other and think more deeply about how the monthly theme has shown up in your life and can show up in a more intentional way.

How to Go About It

Bring these questions with you when the time comes to hang out with your co-parent or parenting/caregiver buddy. Treat the questions less as a quiz and more like doorways inviting you into the world of mutual storytelling and memory. Go through them all or pick a few that call to you the most.

Questions

1. What does “choosing hope” mean to you as a parent? Is it an emotion, a practice, or something else?
2. When have your children helped you find hope?
3. What makes it hardest for you to stay hopeful right now? What helps you return to it?
4. Do you think hope is something we can teach? If so, how do you try to nurture it in your children?
5. How do you balance being honest about the world’s challenges while still instilling hope?
6. When you were a child, who or what gave you hope? How has that shaped the way you parent?
7. Can you recall a time when you witnessed hope growing in your child — maybe through persistence, kindness, or curiosity?
8. How does community — friends, congregation, teachers — sustain your hope as a parent?
9. Where do you personally go (in body or spirit) to refill your well of hope?
10. What’s one small, daily act that helps you keep hope alive in your household?
11. How do you respond when your child expresses fear or hopelessness? What feels most authentic and helpful?
12. Has your understanding of hope changed over the years of parenting? If so, how?
13. What is something you hoped for as a parent that you no longer want?
14. If hope had a voice in your parenting, what might it be whispering to you right now?



Alongside the Chalice

Family spiritual practices and rituals are crucial for kids, youth, and adults. While lighting a chalice at home is a beautiful family practice, it can often be the only explicit UU identity practice we bring into our homes. So our Alongside the Chalice section offers a different UU practice, observance, or ritual for families to try out each month, with the hope that a few stick and become woven into the repeated and treasured rhythms of family life.

Winter Solstice Practice - Day of Candlelight

During the Winter Solstice day, invite families to turn off all electrical lights for the day and use candlelight whenever they need light (perhaps with the luminaries for this packet). For many who celebrate the Winter Solstice, this is often one of the most enjoyable and fulfilling Winter Solstice traditions. To really lean into this ritual, begin in the morning by lighting candles in a few rooms to greet everyone as they wake. As the sun sets, light the candles again and have dinner by candlelight. Candlelight, by default, sets up an intimate, soft mood and an enjoyable experience for both kids and adults.

Winter Planting: "Seeds of Hope"

This practice links together the act of planting or tending a small garden and the cultivation of hope, growth, and patience.

- Each family member chooses a small seed or plant to represent a personal hope — something they want to grow in themselves, their family, or the world.
- Together, plant the seeds in pots, a garden bed, or even a windowsill container. As you water and care for them, use that time to discuss what actions, attitudes, or choices help your hopes grow.
- Over time, observe the growth of the plants and reflect on how patience, care, and persistence nurture hope in real life.
- Optional: Take photos, write journal entries, or share stories about how your hopes are growing alongside the plants.

Anchored In Hope Yoga

For many, yoga is a beautiful form of centering, active meditation, and spiritual practice. Have fun trying this yoga sequence as a guide and an invitation to trust. Just as we condition and strengthen our bodies, so too can we condition and strengthen our sense of trust and hope.

- Joybob The Polar Bear | A Cosmic Kids Yoga Adventure! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DP9jd1Ug2y4
- Anchor In Hope | 18-Minute Yoga Flow https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RoSO3_0Ufr0



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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. A bit more effort, but well worth it!

The Hope Pledge for the Winter Season:

There's a book called Unplug the Christmas Machine. In it, the "Christmas Machine" is a metaphor for everything that can turn a season of peace and beauty into one of stress, busyness, and distraction. Choosing hope means choosing a different way — one that helps us live in alignment with our Unitarian Universalist values of love, compassion, justice, and interconnection.

The Hope Pledge

- Believing in the power of hope and the spirit of this season, I commit myself to…
- Remember those people who truly need my gifts.
- Express my love in ways that go deeper than material presents.
- Shape my celebrations around my deepest values.
- Be a peacemaker within my circle of family and friends.
- Rededicate myself to spiritual growth and wonder.

After reading the pledge together, invite each person to name one way they will choose hope in the weeks ahead.

You might say:
"In the coming weeks, I will try to live into the Hope Pledge by _____."



Blessing of Hope

Dear hope seekers,
dreamers,
and everyday miracle makers,

This winter holiday season, my wish for you is this…

May you give yourselves permission to pause,
and remind yourselves that hope is a choice you can return to again and again.

May you notice the spark in your children's eyes,
and let it light your own heart with wonder and possibility.

May you find warmth and love in the family moments filled with stories, laughter, and connection, and may you treasure the ordinary as much as the extraordinary.

May hope take root in your family,
and may you walk together through life's uncertainties,
finding strength in each other,

And may this winter see the bonds of your family grow ever stronger,
anchored in hope, love, and joy.

Blessed be, and may it be so.

~ ***April Rosario***



Question Jar Cut-Outs

We invite you to write your own questions as well
We also remind you that questions that evoke stories are often the most impactful.

What does hope feel like to you? Is it more like a light, a sound, a taste, or something else?

When was a time you almost gave up but didn't? What helped you hold on?

Who is someone you think of as hopeful? What do they do that shows it?

Can you remember a time when you helped someone else find hope? How did it feel?

When the world feels heavy, what gives you the strength to believe things can get better?

Do you think hope and courage are connected? How?

Do you think hope and humor are connected? How?

What stories, movies, or songs remind you that hope is real?

If hope were a color, what color would it be today? Would it ever change?

Has there ever been a time when you had to choose hope instead of just feeling it?

What small thing gives you hope right now? (Something in nature, a friend, a plan, a memory, etc.)

When have you seen hope grow out of something hard or unexpected?

If you could give someone who feels hopeless one gift, what would it be?

What's one tradition or ritual that helps your family stay hopeful?

Do you think hope is contagious? How can we share it with others?

Imagine it's a year from now — what are you hoping the world, or our family, will look like?

Connect With More Inspiration For You and Your Family!

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 Spotify & YouTube music playlists on the monthly themes.

Credits

Soulful Home packets are prepared by
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Our Soul Matters Director of RE Resources and Family Ministry Coordinator

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