



Soulful Home

Finding the Sacred in
Our Everyday Spaces



February 2020 - Resilience

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The Welcome Mat

What Does it Mean to be a Family of Resilience?

“God doesn’t give you more than you can handle.” Have you heard or seen this adage? How do you feel about it? What about this one: “Whatever doesn’t kill you, makes you stronger.” Personally, I find neither of these particularly empowering in my times of need. Least of all do I appreciate the deceptively cheery “Buck up, Buttercup!”

But, there is an old Sam Cooke recording of a gospel song called “I’m So Glad/Trouble Don’t Last Always,” and that thought does inspire. It is both a gratitude for the ephemeral nature of suffering, and a reminder that whatever the problem, it--and we--will change, morph, grow. That resolve to consciously move forward with time and circumstance is resilience.

This month, we’re going to base our exploration of resilience on a few premises:

One, resilience is something you can build and grow. We reach into our own UU tradition for an example of this, in the At the Bedside section.

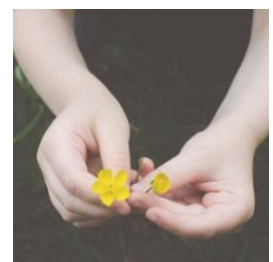
Two, resilient communities are exponentially stronger and more agile than resilient individuals, so going it together is better than going it alone. In the At Play section, we try our hands at ambitious puzzles to demonstrate this idea.

Three, emergent theology tells us that we won’t always know the goal or the outcome of our efforts, or even the right path to take to head toward the good. But--especially with love and support--we can figure out the next right thing to do. The resolve to do just that, the next right thing, is resilience, too. Our monthly mantra encourages us to stay in the story long enough for the next right thing to rise up and be recognized.

For a people of faith, resilience is more than grit (though it can contain grit), and it’s more than good vibes (though good vibes help). Resilience is about keeping the faith together; reminding ourselves and each other of stories of courage, redemption, and community; and consciously--even playfully--cultivating tools to help us grow into our sturdy wholeness.

My best wishes for a month of deep and joyful exploration,

Teresa, *on behalf of the whole Soul Matters team*



At the Table

Exploring Resilience 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. What is one thing you would NEVER give up on? (Could be a task, a game, a person...)
2. Having people to talk to helps us get through hard times. If you were really sad or mad, who's a person (besides your parents) you'd most like to talk to?
3. Are you usually willing and able to ask for help when you need it?
4. When someone is really, really getting on your nerves, how do you keep your cool and resist the temptation to show that you are annoyed?
5. What does it feel like in your body when you do something you didn't think you could?
6. What stresses you out?
7. What helps you to get stress out of your body?
8. Do you feel pressure to do certain things (such as get good grades, or dress a certain way)? How does that pressure feel?
9. None of us do things right every time. Name a time that you messed something up but learned how to do it better next time.
10. Is the little voice in your head more likely to say, "I can do it!" or "I can't do it!" Are those the same voice, or different ones?
11. Was there ever something (a friendship, sport, school subject, video game, book, etc.) you quit or gave up on that you now regret?

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

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.

A Treasure Hunt for Resilience: Come-back Stories Around Us

For this month's search, we're envisioning resilience manifesting in several different ways in our neighborhoods. We can find resilience – i.e. “come-back stories” - in the natural world, in our community offerings, in art, in public services, even in everyday objects found in many public places. With resilience in mind, can you find...

- A fidget spinner (This fad was a huge hit in 2017! Fidget toys can help people relieve stress and calm and focus their minds.)
- A mural or other piece of public art that makes you feel uplifted
- A recharging station (this can be literal or figurative)
- A counseling office (use this opportunity to destigmatize and talk about the role of psychotherapy and counselling in helping people heal and grow)
- Three different types of water fountains (places to step away, take a break, and rejuvenate)
- A First-Aid kit or Defibrillator (resources to help a person recover after an emergency)
- Glowing coals (holding the heat and ready to be blown back into a fire, perhaps?)
- A dandelion (a most resilient wildflower who might be popping up--or laying low, close the ground--where you live!)
- A community center (where a resilient community might offer free services to help folks socialize, move their bodies, get career or tax help, etc.)



At Play

Playing Games with Resilience

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: Resilience through Risk - Playing with Fire

One important way we build resilience is by doing hard and potentially dangerous things and reflecting back later on how we made it through those experiences using our skills, wisdom, courage, perseverance, support system, and even faith.

In that spirit, this month we invite you to play with fire! Many children have mixed associations with fire--it's fascinating, but also scary, with the ability to gather people, but also (often) forbidden for young folks. In this activity, we want children to feel equipped, empowered, responsible, reliable, and self-reliant (all important aspects of growing resilience) as they do the difficult and somewhat risky task of building a fire.

Playfully--but well-scaffolded with safety knowledge and lots of parent participation--build a fire or two or three this month. For this activity, a small grill on a balcony or a stone-ringed pit in the backyard will work fine, but a designated fire area in a state or national park campground--away from home--would heighten the challenge. If you're already proficient at making fires, challenge yourself to do something more: a really ambitious effort might be to work on [friction fires](#), but building a [one-match fire](#) is quite a challenge for many of us, too. Who can build the fire the fastest? Who can build the fire that burns the longest? Who can put out the fire most effectively? "Risky play" has lots of other benefits, too, which you can read about here:

<https://www.cbc.ca/natureofthings/features/risky-play-for-children-why-we-should-let-kids-go-outside-and-then-get-out>

You might even consider coupling your fire building with one of the other activities in your Soulful Home packet this month, such as a before-bed storytelling (maybe stories about challenges you've faced as individuals and as a family?) or using fire's tendency to inspire introspection to help you have a quieter, deeper conversation with a partner about the resilience you've seen in each other as you've become a family.

Here's a guide to basic bonfires for the family:

<https://www.metroparent.com/daily/family-fun/family-activities/build-campfire-tips-teach-kids/>



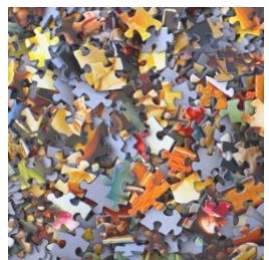
Remember to reflect on the fire-building in the days and weeks that follow. It's no small feat that, in the albeit incredibly unlikely event that you were stranded in the wilderness in cold temperatures, you could reach back to these memories, fashion yourself a fire, and stay warm. In building that skill, you also built confidence and resilience.

Option B: Resilience in Persisting through Difficulty - Puzzles

Many-pieced puzzles might seem tedious or intimidating to young people but getting offered one task--collecting the blue pieces, or the edge pieces, or working on one small section, for example--whilst other family members work on their own tasks can make the endeavor manageable and fun. It also demonstrates how all of us are piecing together the mystery of living, together--none of us alone. And what a sense of accomplishment you all share when it's finally finished!

Find an ambitious but manageable puzzle for your family to tackle; for my family with kids ranging from age 5 to 14, an eye-catching 500 piece puzzle is about right for everybody to be inspired to pitch in. Some families make the puzzle a one-evening event, and others set it up somewhere out-of-the-way where it can be left up so that people can drop in and out of the activity.

[This puzzle](#) features birds you might begin to see more of as the seasons begin to turn, and [this puzzle](#) memorializes the 2017 Women's March and its many intersecting topics.



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.

February’s Mantra:

“This is not the end of my story.”

One helpful way to think of resilience is as our ability to come back to self after setback and disappointment. When we suffer a setback, we often get stuck when we can’t narrate ourselves past the painful point we are then in--I failed, because I’m not good, and I’ll never be able to do it; I did not expect to be hurt this way, so the world feels dangerous to me now, and I don’t think I’ll ever feel safe again; Nothing in my life is as I want it to be.

It’s hard to hear our loved one communicate a pessimistic worldview, or a negative opinion of themselves. In moments such as these, it’s challenging for us as parents to not sneak in and do a little fixing. Maybe we’re savvy enough to not come right out with, “Well, what you SHOULD do is...” But in more subtle words, or even with facial expressions and body language, we sometimes communicate to our children that their despondency or anger or nihilism is unhealthy, and that they need to move on with feeling better, because we’re worried about them.

But here’s the thing: resilience is built and recognized in adversity. In exactly those moments when our children are filled with doubts, fears, worries, and disappointments is when we can look for resilience to flower.

Listening is an excellent response. Reflective questions are good, too. And a reminder that they are a person-in-progress, that their story continues from here. Use this mantra judiciously and make room for the unknown; each of our stories is being written with the very next thought we think, the very next action we take. Use these words to help keep the book open while your child (with your love, in the space you’re holding for them) musters the will to pick back up their own pencil...



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.

Fuel for Resilience: Eating a Chair

Storytelling itself begets resilience; narrative is the primary means through which we tell ourselves who we are, drawn from what we've done in the past, and thus, what we believe we're capable of doing in the future. This month's story is drawn from our Unitarian Universalist tradition and has to do with skills we use to build up resilience, or our ability to adjust to adversity. Some of those skills are 1) reaching for big goals, a little bit at a time, so we know we can do hard things; 2) doing hard things playfully, and with curiosity, without taking ourselves too seriously; and 3) visualizing ourselves in the place we'd like to be, allowing ourselves to feel good feelings as we do so. All of these are skills that help us grow into a people who persevere in the face of big challenges.

The story "[The Chair Men](#)" is more a vignette than a tale, told by UU minister Robert Fulghum, and it's unconventional for a bedtime story! (Changing it up is a great way to keep kids interested.) Don't be surprised if your read-aloud prompts some unusual questions or other responses from your listeners.

For a little help, consider asking these questions at the end of the recollection:

1. What part of this story surprised you?
2. What's something "unique and memorable" you might like to do?
3. What do you think the students learned after their odd and interesting experiment?
4. Finally, name some preparations based on your family's food culture for how you'd eat the chair--Cooked into pancakes? Sprinkled over tacos? Dropped into the crock-pot stew?

Our Home as a Bastion of Resilience

Do you have a prayer, or blessing, or other routine that carries you all off to sleep? If you don't, or if you're willing to try a new one this month, consider using the very first song in the Unitarian Universalist hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*, "May Nothing Evil Cross This Door." It is a hymn about resilience, about relying on one another to stay strong in the face of great adversity, and it is very beautiful. You can listen to it here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C4rSAIts3MA>



On the Porch

Raising a Child of Resilience Together

On the Porch supports sharing realizations, challenges and hopes around the theme with other supportive adults. 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.

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.

A Sip of Something More: Share Your Best Tricks!

Resilience can be learned and re-learned, and we can help one another with these lessons. Here, we’re going to give voice to (and remember together) our best tricks and tips to build fortitude and perseverance for the challenging task of raising a family. What are your best strategies for building resilience? For ideas, read the strategies below, which work for some folks:

1. Name and express gratitude for your strengths
2. Get enough sleep at night
3. Sing! (If this one piques your interest, come back later and check out our Soul Matters Spotify list for songs about resilience:
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvXOKgOQVYP7-GP08C-jEL-DqEBVydle5>
Or if you just want one, here’s a good choice:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-NIX-l11MMA>)
4. Eat the foods that help you feel strong and energetic
5. Focus energy on what’s in your own sphere of influence rather than what others say and do
6. Regularly catch up with a friend who isn’t afraid to hold you to your own standards of your best self when asked to
7. Meditate (once a week? three days a week? every day?)
8. Actively make peace with the past
9. Move your body
10. Spend time out of doors, in a setting where you feel safe and engaged
11. Take regular breaks from social media (with a frequency and duration that works for you)
12. Celebrate others’ success
13. Spend time with a pet (your own or a friend’s)
14. Celebrate your own progress and improvement
15. Watch or read something funny



Now, each of you name your own TOP FIVE strategies...

After you list your top 5, think about them more deeply using these questions:

- Which resiliency practice/habit is “saving” you right now?
- Which one have you let slide and need to start doing more of again?
- Which one was given to you by someone else?
- Which one did you discover on your own?
- Which do you need to pass on to someone in your life?

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.

Which Question is “Yours”?

- What is a story of resilience told in your family of origin? (What parts were focused on when this story was told as you grew up, versus the parts that YOU focus on when you tell a parenting partner?)
- Who is someone you know who just doesn’t stay down for long, who seems to weather adversity with grace and strength? Have you ever told them that you admire this quality in them?
- Resilience has an ebb and a flow. At this present moment, do you feel your resilience flowing or receding?
- Whose resilience created an opportunity for you to be who you are? Whose acts of resilience inspired your own?
- What is your favorite moment of your child showing resilience? .
- Remind your parenting partner of a time that their support helped you to be more resilient when facing a hardship.
- In what way is your parenting partner “surprisingly resilient”? I.e. how are they resilient in ways that aren’t commonly acknowledged or noticed?
- We all may choose to “suffer in silence,” at least temporarily, as a strategy to get by in a tough situation. If you haven’t yet had a chance to voice and process the pent-up frustration, disappointment, guilt, anger, etc., tell the story now to your parenting partner, and ask for their supportive listening.



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. The 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!

The Resilience Behind Those Who Were First

In 2017, Time magazine released a multimedia project titled “[Firsts](#),” featuring women who were the first in their fields to accomplish what they accomplished--Ursula Burns, the first Black woman to head a Fortune 500 company; Sylvia Earle, the first woman to become chief scientist of NOAA; Mo’ne Davis, the first girl to pitch a Little League baseball world series; Danica Roem, the first openly trans legislator; Mae Jemison the first woman of color in space-46 women total, many names well-known and many not. There are short videos (most around 3 minutes) featuring each of these women individually, as well as videos that address topics such motivation, mentors, and family, with many voices represented.

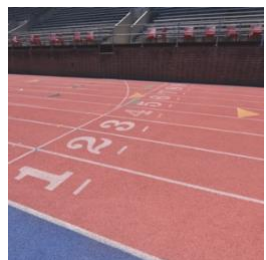
Each of these women, in their own words, describe an aspect of resilience that they utilized or cultivated in order to be who they are, doing the amazing things they wanted to do in the world. Queue up a few videos over the course of a week or so and consider together with your family the most important thing each woman said. A few gems to look out for:

“A lot of what pioneers do; they do not benefit from.”

“The glass ceiling, that imagery, is violent.”

“Don’t let anyone trivialize how you have spent your years. All of them have contributed to making a very unique and special person who can make a very unique and special contribution to our country.”

<https://time.com/collection/firsts/>

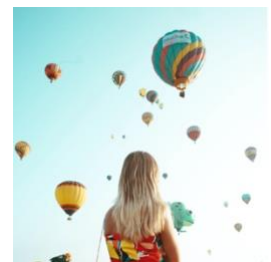


Blessing

Oh, resilient families! How many times have we gone down under the weight of the world, from personal indignities to traumas and oppressions? And though we rise again, we sometimes ask, how much more can I take? Is it worth it? The burden is heavy. The obstacles are real. The horizon is far. In these moments of doubt and disappointment, may your faith and your people be sources of healing and strength. In your care of self and others, may the warmth of your own shining face turning again toward the sun remind you that your connection to what is right and good in this universe can never be broken. In your effort to persevere, may you remember that you are made in the image of divine, powerful and worthy of all love. Blessings of resilience to you, dear ones; we persevere together.



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
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