



Soulful Home

Finding the Sacred in
Everyday Spaces



Deep Listening
October 2024

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Blessing of Deep Listening

Thanks to Our Widening the Circle Team

We thank our [Widening The Circle Team](#) for their insight and help with this packet. From the stories to the activities, their support and research runs throughout this packet. Their help putting inclusion and love at the center of our packets is a vital part of helping families center love in their faithful everyday moments.

The Welcome Mat

Exploring the Practice of Deep Listening

No matter what anyone says, I think listening -deep or otherwise- is a huge part of raising and caring for children and youth. For those who have had our little ones with us since infancy, it starts with “Did you hear that?” as we frantically check the baby monitors to see if they have stirred from their sleep. As they grow, it evolves into phrases like “Put your listening ears on!” when they are little, and “Are you even listening?” as they approach their preteen and teenage years.

We want them to listen to us; they want us to listen to them. We try to teach them how to listen to others, and to stand up for themselves when others aren’t listening to them.

Being a parent has also taught me *how* to listen. For instance, when in a crowd, I am often able to pick out my children's voices above all the other background noise. I’ve also learned that listening involves my eyes much more than my ears. For example, when my oldest comes home from school, without her saying a word, I can “hear” how her day went based just on her attitude, body language, and facial expressions. Likewise, I can “hear” that my youngest is telling me he is struggling to regulate his emotions when he, who is almost as tall as I am, comes and tries to curl up in my lap because he is looking for a deep pressure hug.

Additionally, being a parent has blessed me with the gift of remembering to slow down so I can listen more deeply. That slowness almost always opens up a safe and comfortable space that allows my child to share more fully and vulnerably. I’ve also been blessed by having to listen more patiently. It’s not always easy to stay present and attentive to a 20-minute, all-over-the-map story from your toddler, but in the end it is worth every minute! Similarly, it’s not easy to hang in there while your preteen complains about your co-parent's parenting decision, but when I can withhold immediate rebuttal, I am inevitably blessed with hearing the worry or pain underneath that complaint.

This month, my hope is that you all take the time to allow yourself to listen deeply to everything your families are “saying.” And that you listen deeply to the words spoken and those that are unspoken, embracing all of the different communication styles that show up in your home.

And maybe most of all, may we all be present to the great gift of the many voices and sounds our kids make, knowing one day we will miss that “noise” more than we can say.

Blessed Be,

April



At the Table

Exploring Invitation Through Discussions

The At the Table section engages the theme through question-driven family discussions. 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 the bonds within a family as members learn more about each other by asking and answering evocative questions.

How To Go About It

The most straightforward way to go about this is to have parents/caregivers read off the questions they think will resonate the most with family members and have everyone take turns answering.

Another fun way to do this is to create [a family question jar](#). To make this easier for you, 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 is your favorite sound? Why is it your favorite?
2. What is your least favorite sound and why?
3. What makes someone a good listener?
4. When is it hard for you to be a good listener?
5. When do you try hard NOT to be heard?
6. When you are scared and worried, what words do you most want to hear?
7. What's the most amazing sound you've heard?
8. What's one brand new sound you've heard recently? One you've previously never heard before?
9. Have you ever heard your body speak?
10. What do feelings tell you that words or thoughts sometimes don't?
11. Can you hear the differences among family members walking down the hall or coming in the front door? What does each person sound like?
12. What could we, as a family, work on to become better listeners?
13. Can you have a conversation without words?
14. If you could go back to a conversation and correct how you listened, what conversation would that be?
15. What sounds frighten or bother you?
16. What sounds fill you with joy?



At Play

Playing With Invitation as a Family

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

Option A: This Month's Treasure Hunt: A Listening Scavenger Hunt

Let's collect some sounds this month! One really special thing about sounds is that they are easy to share--there's no scarcity, nothing to call dibs on. Everyone can receive the gift. Some of the sounds below are audible and some are felt through the vibrations they make.

There's no one right way to go about this. You can make it a month-long adventure and see how big your list can be. Or do it during one long walk. Or maybe do it on a few different walks and compare which walk and location had the most sounds. Whichever approach you take, here's a list to look for, but we're sure you can find many more!

1. A dog barking over at somebody else's house (maybe a neighbor's yard or a classmate's pet heard through video call)
2. A plane zooming overhead
3. Two (or more) birds communicating using their songs
4. A family member coming home (this might be a familiar car pulling into the driveway, familiar footsteps coming upstairs, or familiar keys jangling in front of a lock)
5. The sound of love (What could this be?)
6. The word "vote" said on the radio or TV
7. Rushing water (maybe somebody turned on the bath in the other room, maybe you live near a creek, maybe a good rain sent water gushing down the street)
8. Someone saying, "thank you."
9. The rustling of dry leaves kicked up by the wind
10. A mysterious sound whose source you can't identify
11. Music from a car passing by
12. Church bells that ring throughout the neighborhood
13. The sound of a family member breathing quietly or loudly (snoring) while they sleep.

Option B: The Listening Game

Come together as a family to play this really simple, super fun game! The challenge is to pick up as many different everyday sounds as you can from the audio track. It will test your listening skills and will show how difficult listening can be.

<https://www.childrenandyouth.co.uk/children/listening-game/>



Option C: Simon Says

Put your family to the test and see who has some wonderful active listening skills by playing the classic game Simon Says.

Option D: Learn “Pig Latin”

Speaking in a code or specific style forces us to think a little bit deeper about the way we use language to communicate. Learn the tricks of Pig Latin together as a family, then choose one night to try and speak only in that style. It might be fun, but it also might be frustrating. If it’s frustrating for family members, pause and talk about why this might be so. Maybe communicating is taking longer than usual. Maybe we keep forgetting the rules. Keep it light and approach any challenges with curiosity. Play with the Pig Latin as long as it’s fun, and let it go when it’s time!

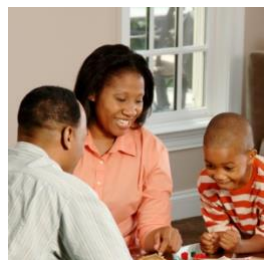
Here’s a video showing how it’s done: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EoX6Nasi7cM>

And if Pig Latin is too familiar for your family, or you’re up for something different, try learning to speak gibberish! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B5-K7f-ddAc>

Option E: [Speak Out Kids Vs Parents Game](#)

It can sometimes be hard to understand what people are trying to communicate to us, as you will quickly find out with this game. This is where deep listening can really come in handy! Gather everyone up and listen as people take turns saying different phrases while wearing a mouthpiece that won’t let them shut their mouths. Here’s a description of the game:

“Parents pick from the Parent’s deck of cards, filled with phrases parents might say to kids such as “This playroom is a positive pigsty!” Kids get to choose from the Kids deck, which is filled with things kids might say, such as “What a bummer, brother.” Players read the phrase as best as they can to their teammates, but it’s not so easy to do as the timer counts down and the mouthpiece is hindering them from forming words correctly. The laughter continues as players try to decipher what their teammate is trying to say, and they must correctly guess the phrase in order to earn the card. The team with the most cards at the end of the game wins.”



At the Bedside and in the Book Nook

At The Bedside & In the Nook suggests books that help families engage 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.

[Woodland Sounds \(Sound Board Book\)](#) by Sam Taplin (suggested for kids 4 & below)

Have fun bringing this book about the woodlands to life as you read the story and then get to press the sound button to hear woodland sounds, including an owl, cuckoo, and woodpecker, rustling leaves, and rippling streams.

Invitation to Connect: *Share what your favorite woodland sound is, or turn the book into a guessing game by pushing the buttons and letting kids guess what makes that sound.*

[The Sound of Kindness](#) by Joseph Cornell (suggested for kids 4-8)

Dive into this wonderful story that follows a child and their adult as they explore their neighborhood, listening for the sounds of kindness.

Invitation to Connect: *Kindness is all around us every day if we know where to look for it—and listen! Have a conversation with your child about some of the sounds of kindness they hear each day directed at them and directed at others. Make a list or brainstorm some of the sounds of kindness they can create in the days and weeks to come. And if you have time, take it a step further and embark on your own sounds of kindness walk and see what you can hear!*

[Listening Ninja: A Children's Book About Active Listening and Learning How to Listen](#) by Mary Nhin (suggested for kids 5-8)

Go on an adventure with Listening Ninja in this comedic book and learn how to listen with your ears and eyes.

Invitation to Connect: *Have a conversation with your kids about the different ways people communicate and how to be an active listener with both their ears and their eyes.*

[Listen to This](#) by Jennifer Blecher (suggested for youth 10-13 years old)

Secrets, rumors, shifting friendships, overbearing parents, and, on top of all that, a first dance—how does anyone survive seventh grade? Youth will love this book, which is told from dual points of view. It is about two tweens finding their voices and standing up for themselves.

“Lily, Maddie, and Sasha have always been the perfect friendship trio. But this year, everything is changing. Maddie and Sasha made the elite soccer team, and Lily feels that they’re always leaving her behind. And everyone seems to have secrets now: Maddie, Sasha, Lily’s sister, and even Lily herself. Lily’s classmate Will wishes he had some secrets. After all, his life is already out there for the whole world to hear about, thanks to his dad’s super-popular parenting podcast. Then, his dad finally crosses a line. Will is not sure he can forgive him. But maybe when Lily and Will meet, they’ll find just what they need: someone who will listen.”

Invitation to Connect: *Parents/caregivers, if you have a young teen who is struggling to navigate friendships at this tender age or find their voice, this is a wonderful book to offer them.*



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.

Option A

Bluey - Season 1 Episode 10 "Hotel" (G)

Bluey and Bingo decide to run a crazy hotel with Dad acting as their put-upon guest, but when Bingo quits over Bluey's controlling nature, Dad must teach them the importance of listening for ways to compromise.

Invitation to Connect: *Talk about how all friends disagree sometimes, but when we listen to each other, we are able to come to a compromise.*

Option B

How to Train Your Dragon (PG)

Hiccup, a Viking teenager, has long wanted to follow his tribe's tradition of becoming a dragon slayer. But after capturing his first dragon, he finds his heart telling him to instead befriend it. This wonderful movie is a fantastic example of all the good that can come from listening to your heart.

Invitation to Connect: *Parents, here's your chance to talk with your kids about how they are following their hearts and what it feels like when they go against the norms when listening to their inner wisdom.*

Option C

Sweet Nothing In My Ear (PG, 10-year-olds and up)

Hearing, devoted family father Dan Miller is delighted when a pioneering medical team's cochlear implant project offers his deaf son a chance to hear. Dan's deaf-mute wife, Laura, however, leads a 'deaf pride' movement, which isn't satisfied with handicapped facilities but in earnest promotes a 'deaf culture.' Dan and Laura Miller need to come to terms with each other's charged viewpoints to answer the question, "What is the best decision for our son?" The decision is further complicated by medical risks regarding the implant.

Invitation to Connect: *Parents, allow yourself to be a bit vulnerable and talk about how it can be hard to know what the right thing to do for your children is when there are multiple views and different ideas about what is "best."*

Option D

Hidden Figures (PG, 10-year-olds and up)

Snuggle up as a family and watch the true story of how three women of color use their voices and demand to be heard when they know they are the best ones for the job.



In the Toolbox

Strategies to Help Our Kids Navigate the Complicated Stuff

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

Resource One

The Power of Listening with Your Heart

Children naturally want to share with us all their observations. But how do we respond when they open up to share? After a long, full day, listening can be challenging for all of us.

<https://www.doinggoodtogether.org/dgt-newsletter/listen-with-heart>

Resource Two

Discover Your Child's Love Language

Children express and receive love in different ways – some through affirming words, others through acts of service, still others through gifts, quality time, or physical touch. Each of these expressions of love represents a different "language." Learning to listen and hear what love language your child is wanting to “hear” from you might just make all the difference.

<https://www.parents.com/parenting/better-parenting/advice/love-languages-of-children/>

Resource Three

The Gift of Deep Listening

It's easy to fall into advice or fix-it mode with our kids instead of deeply listening. We hate to see others struggle and want to jump in and fix things. But, often, the best way to help them grow is simply to listen. To validate their experience and allow them to process their thoughts and emotions out loud. And there's no better way to build connection and trust.

<https://jessicaspeer.com/2020/12/10/deep-listening/>

Resource Four

5 Ways to Help Kids Handle Disagreements With Friends

We can't escape conflict, even if we want to (and most of us probably do). Disagreements are a normal part of life for both kids and adults, but they don't have to be a dealbreaker. According to Positive Psychology, disagreements in any kind of relationship — friendship included — can make the relationship stronger and encourage better understanding between two people. With guidance, your child can recognize that a disagreement doesn't have to mean the end of a friendship. You can increase your child's confidence and capability to handle the ups and downs of friendships by helping them understand that conflict is normal and by providing them with tools to handle disagreements when they arise.

<https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/ways-to-help-kids-handle-disagreements-with-friends>



On the Porch

Connecting and Sharing Stories with [Your Village](#)

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 storytelling and memory. Go through them all or pick a few that call to you most.

Questions

1. Thinking back to your childhood, what did you learn about listening by watching your parents interact with each other?
2. What are the sounds of your parenting?
3. Who could you count on to listen to you when you were a child?
4. If your child was to rank you on a scale of 1-10 on how well you listen, what number would they give you and why?
5. What have your children taught you about listening in the last six months? The last year? The last five years?
6. Are you an external processor--someone who makes sense of their experiences by talking out loud as thoughts come--or do you process silently, to yourself, until you have come to a conclusion that you want to share? How about your parenting partner? How do you as a couple navigate those difference or overlapping similarities?
7. Our children require different kinds of listening as they age. What new kind of listening are your children needing from you now? Why?
8. Do you always answer your child(ren)'s questions?
9. What's the best deep/meaningful conversation you've had with your child(ren)?
10. Do you struggle with yelling at your kids to get them to listen? Think together about what strategies you might try to handle those situations differently.
11. What part of deep listening is hardest for you? (Examples might be not giving advice, keeping my facial expression neutral when I hear something that upsets me, watching a loved one suffer as they share their fears and worries, hearing hard truths about myself, etc.)
12. We get messages from all different sources including our intuition and our conditioning ,and it can often be hard (especially when it comes to intuition and conditioning) to tell the where the messages we are hearing are coming from. This can be made even harder when we have identities different from those we are listening to. When you encounter a challenge such as this, who do you turn to as a sounding board to be vulnerable and curious as you learn? Or what resources help you to make sense of this?
13. What is one thing you could do in the coming weeks to listen more compassionately to yourself?



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-oriented 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.

Two Ways to “Pray”!

T.H.I.S Prayer/Grace

People often ask if UUs pray or say grace, and if so, how do they do that and who to they pray to? The answer is that there is no one way that a UU might pray, just as there is no one way to be spiritual or have faith. That said, a “T.H.I.S. prayer/blessing ritual” is a simple way to get started if you are trying out or want to incorporate a prayer into your family’s spiritual life.

The T.H.I.S. Prayer is very simple: naming one thing you are **T**-Thankful for, then one thing you **H**- Hope will **H**appen, followed by one thing you would like to **I**-Improve, and finally one thing you're **S**-Sorry for.

At-Home Joys & Concerns

“We listen to each other. It is a holy act to share our joys and sorrows, and with grace it flows on back.” - unknown

We all have busy lives, but it is important to pause and connect with the joys that day has given you and the concerns it has asked you to carry. In fact many UU congregations do this in their worship services as sharing those joys and concerns with others helps us feel less alone. The same is true for families. So, for a week or two this month, set aside some time at the end of the day, before dinner, or during your chalice lighting to share the joys and sorrows that have arisen during the day.

Do two rounds of sharing.

First, invite each family member to share something for which they are thankful. The aim here is to make room to notice the good things all around us even though times are hard. After this first round of joys and gratitude's, share something or someone you have a concern for as a way to bring the struggles of others into our hearts, a way of connecting to the interconnected web of life.



The Extra Mile

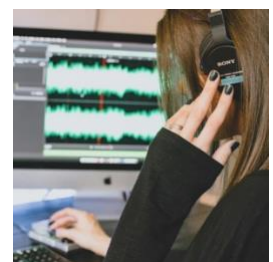
The Extra Mile section is for families who want to continue exploring the theme of the month through larger adventures, more complex projects, or simply through additional modalities not otherwise included in the packets. A bit more effort, but well worth it!

A Family Sound Portrait

What are the sounds around your own home? Which ones create feelings of comfort, security, and familiarity? Using a smartphone, a laptop computer, or other recording equipment, and working as a family, create a recording of different sound clips that together make up the soundscape of your soulful home. Here are some ideas. Have fun adding your own!

- The percolation of the coffee pot or whistle of the tea kettle
- Laughing together
- A pet barking happily/purring
- A clock ticking
- A squeaky door opening
- Somebody running up or down stairs
- The sound of keys as a parent gets home
- Splashing in a bathtub
- What else?

Save the sound file someplace secure. What you've made is a kind of sound portrait of your life together at this moment in time, a family treasure to be enjoyed in the decades to come!



Blessing of Deep Listening

Dear fellow tear wipers, huggers, booboo kissers, and special moment makers,

This month, my wish for you is this...

That you notice the many ways your children communicate with you, and that with this noticing, you allow the “ears” of your heart to hear to concerns and longings of children who are not heard or noticed.

That when you listen deeply to your children, you open space to connect with them in new and deeper ways, laying the paths and rhythms that will keep you close for many years to come.

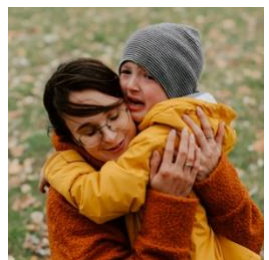
That your listening awakens you to the longings that have sat quiet inside for far too long.

That you hear the voice of who you were before you began raising children and answer its calls – whatever it might be beckoning you back to. Whether that be painting with brushes rather than fingers, reading books that do not contain pictures, or cooking meals that you like even if you are the only one who does.

Listening doesn't just help us hear others. It also expands our world and helps us hear our own hungers. May that gift of a larger world and knowing yourself more fully be yours this month.

Blessed be, and May it Be So.

April



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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You are free to use any of this material verbatim in worship, newsletters
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Learn more about subscribing on our website:

<https://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com/soulful-home.html>

Question Jar Cut-Outs

Notice that there are a few blank strips at the bottom of the list.

We invite you to write your own questions on those strips.

We also remind you that questions that evoke stories are often the most impactful.

What is your favorite sound? Why is it your favorite?

What is your least favorite sound and why?

What makes someone a good listener?

When is it hard for you to be a good listener?

When do you try hard NOT to be heard?

When you are scared and worried, what words do you most want to hear?

What's the most amazing sound you've heard?

What's one brand new sound you've heard recently? One you've previously never heard before?

Have you ever heard your body speak?

What do feelings tell you that words or thoughts sometimes don't?

Is there a difference between an invitation and a welcome?
If so, what is it?

Can you hear the differences among family members walking down the hall
or coming in the front door? What does each person sound like?

What could we, as a family, work on to become better listeners?

Can you have a conversation without words?

If you could go back to a conversation and correct how you listened, what
conversation would that be?

What sounds frighten or bother you?

What sounds fill you with joy?

*A few blank strips to fill in using
your own inquisitively creative minds!*
