



Soulful Home

Finding the Sacred in
Everyday Spaces



The Practice of Invitation
September 2024

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Opening to Invitation

Thanks to Our Widening the Circle Team

We would like to thank [The 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 in turn a vital part of helping families also center love in their faithful everyday moments.

The Welcome Mat

Exploring the Practice of Invitation

On the surface, invitations are a huge part of parenting. Over the years, we receive countless invitations: invitations to baby showers, birthday parties, school events, shows, playdates, and the list goes on and on.

But when we dig a bit deeper, there is so much more that we are being invited to the second we step foot on the journey to raise and care for the young people in our lives.

Being a parent has taught me that every day is an invitation to be my best self and to help my children do the same. There is never a day that goes 100% according to plan, and as someone who struggles with anxiety, this can be hard for me. But I am aware that even this anxiety is an invitation to work on my flexibility, coping skills, and self-care. As I do this, I am, in turn, modeling for my children what to do when things don't go their way or as hoped.

Being a parent has also blessed me with the invitation to remember my inner child, the importance of being silly, and being intentional about creating space in my life to play and be in the moment. Parenting is serious business. After all, we quite literally hold a life in our hands. And yet, it is also true that when I take parenting too seriously, I forget that what I really hold in my arms is joy itself.

This month, my hope for you all is that you notice and lean into similar invitations. And that you remember these invitations often come in disguises, from your child's contagious giggle to their ability to stare at a ladybug for 20 minutes straight, from your worry to your mama bear protective instincts. On the deepest level, it's all an invitation to remember that this thing we call parenting is an immeasurably precious gift.

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 simply 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's the best thing you have ever been invited to? What made it so special?
2. Is it easy or hard for you to invite people to do things with you?
3. What is something you hope to be invited to this year?
4. What is an emotion you would love to invite more into your life?
5. What skill would you love to invite into your life this year?
6. If you could invite anyone from history to spend the day with you, who would it be and why?
7. What's the opposite of invitation?
8. Is there anything you would not want to be invited to, and why?
9. What book character would you invite on a picnic? What would you make them for lunch?
10. Is there a difference between an invitation and a welcome? If so, what is it?
11. Would you prefer to be invited to a party with 100 people or a party with 10 people? And why?
12. This year, we're exploring practices that help us live into our new UU core value of putting love at the center of the things we do. How can invitations be made into acts of love?



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: How Inviting is Your Home?

Many of us think, or want to believe, that our homes are inviting, but our judgment might be a bit clouded as we are in our homes all the time and comfortable there. The bigger question is, when we invite folks over, do they feel welcomed and truly invited? This month's treasure hunt will help us answer that question.

As a family, take some time this month to hunt down /count up all the ways your home is welcoming and inviting. For example, do you have a doormat that says welcome? If you are a family of 4, do you have more than four plates available for extra people to join you in a meal? Do you leave an extra roll of toilet paper out and visible, so folks don't have to rummage through your cabinets? If you have a pool, do you have an extra life jacket or floaties? Spend some "treasure hunt time" looking over your house, and then, as a family, talk about if your home is as inviting as you want it to be.

Option B: Invitations to Play

Many families are stretched thin by how busy and structured their schedules can become. This month, to help slow down and invite in some imaginative play, try finding opportunities to create "invitations to play" as a family. What is an invitation to play, you might ask? It is simply the chance to play with open-ended materials in a creative, non-directive way, with no criteria for success. Click on these links to guide you on your way: [What is an Invitation to Play?](#) & [Creating Invitations to Play!](#)

Option C: Invite the Whole Family onto the Couch

Many of us have mixed feelings about our children playing video games alone on the couch. While finding alternatives to video games is important, sometimes a big step in the right direction is to invite the whole family onto the couch!

The below list of "all-on-the-couch" co-op video games invites this family approach as a possible new and welcome shift from the perspective on video games as good or bad. Not all of the games below will suit all audiences and ages. To learn more about each game, click [here](#). If none of these games seem quite right, search "family couch co-op games" in your browser to see if something great comes up for you!

[Overcooked All You Can Eat](#)
[Mario 3D World](#)
[Minecraft](#)

[Sackboy A Big Adventure](#)
[My Singing Monsters Playground](#)
[Minecraft Dungeons](#)

[Very Very Valet](#)
[Mario Party Superstars](#)
[Rayman Legends](#)
[Just Dance 2022](#)

Option D: Invite Them to Game Night

Games are fun, but they are even more fun when we involve our extended family and or friends. So, pick a date for a fun group game night and *formally invite folks to come to it*. You could, of course, call or text folks, but there is something very special about receiving an invitation in the mail or being handed one. So, to take your family play to the next level, have some fun creating physical invitations to your game night. Which games might you play? The classics are always a great choice: Pictionary, Bingo, Scattergories, Taboo, Charades, [QUIZADO](#)



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.

[The Birthday Invitation](#) by Lucy Rowland (suggested for kids 5 and below)

When handing out the invitations for her birthday party, Ella mistakenly drops one on the forest floor, and suddenly, an amazing array of unexpected guests show up! A wonderful testament to how we are enriched as we expand the circle of who we invite into our lives.

Invitation to Connect: *Parents, how about telling a story about how you were changed or enriched because you invited someone new or different than you into your life? Also, invite your child to think about who in their school often doesn't get invited to play or to events and how they might reach out to them with a welcoming invitation.*

[The Invitation](#) by Stacey May Fowles (suggested for kids 4-8)

The main character, Fern, opens her mailbox and finds an envelope. Fern hates surprises and has a lot of anxiety about inviting the unknown into her life. Friends (and an inner positive voice) help her move through the worry and find the joy in inviting in experiences that are new.

Invitation to Connect: *Help your child express the many feelings they have when facing surprises or the unknown. Also, consider letting them know how you were like Fern when you were younger (and maybe still are). If you have a child who struggles with anxiety, this is a great book to open space about the tools they can use to work through hard things.*

[Schooled](#) by Gordon Korman (suggested for youth 10-13 years old)

Being the new student at a new school is never easy. It's even harder if you've been homeschooled and are now attending public school for the first time. This was certainly the case for this story's main character, Capricorn (Cap) Anderson, who is not invited in with kind and open arms by his new classmates. For Cap, the road to invitation and welcome is a bumpy one, but his commitment to staying true to himself gets him through.

Invitation to Connect: *Parents/caregivers, if you have a young teen who is struggling with being an outsider or feeling pressured not to be themselves, we encourage you to get this book for them. Then, once they are done, invite them on a walk and talk about how it connected with their own story or didn't.*



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 2 Episode 35 "Cafe" (G)

Bluey meets a new playmate named Winnie, but when Bluey wants to invite her and her dad home for breakfast, she learns that adults sometimes have a bit harder time inviting in friendships.

Invitation to Connect: *Talk about what makes building friendships complicated and discuss the difference between child friendships and adult friendships.*

Option B

[Inside Out 2](#) (PG)

Riley (the main character) begins to grow up and, in the process, learns that she has to invite in some [very complicated new emotions](#) as a teenager: Anxiety, Envy, Ennui, and Embarrassment.

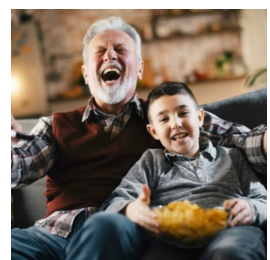
Invitation to Connect: *Parents, here's your chance to share with your kids some funny (and hard) stories about how you invited in anxiety, envy and embarrassment! It's also a chance to help your younger children understand your teenage children a bit better.*

Option C

Spider-Man - [Across the Spider-Verse](#) (PG, [10 year olds and up](#))

Miles unintentionally triggers a catastrophic event and finds himself in a world of other "Spideys." But he discovers he's not as welcome as he'd hoped. This brilliant movie is all about the hunger to be "invited in," about knowing that there are other people out there who are like you but having no access to them, and being surrounded by people who are on a different wavelength.

Invitation to Connect: *Parents, allow yourself to be a bit vulnerable and talk about your own childhood struggles to find belonging. Also, consider opening space to talk about how, even though we need the love and acceptance of our family, we also need to find our "own people" outside our families.*



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 today. It's all about equipping parents to be better guides and companions for their kids.

Resource One

Please Invite My Kid with Special Needs to Your Kid's Party

We all want to model inclusive and welcoming behaviors for our children, but we might not always know how to go about it. This article is full of fantastic tips and advice for making birthday parties more inclusive so that everyone can feel fully invited. It only takes small tweaks to make a party inclusive so kids with neurological differences can have the kind of childhood experiences all kids deserve.

<https://www.todaysparent.com/family/special-needs/please-invite-my-kid-with-special-needs-to-your-kids-party/>

Resource Two

13 Ways to Help Your Young Teen Make Friends

Navigating friendships is challenging for little kids, youth, and adults alike. But there is something particularly hard about making and inviting in new friendships when you are a young teen. This article helps parents better understand the complexity of teen friendship today and offers a ton of tips to help your early teen child navigate those complexities.

<https://www.ashleyhudsontherapy.com/post/13-ways-on-how-to-help-your-teen-make-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. Were you a child who was frequently invited into friendships and activities? If not, what helped you navigate that? If so, did you use your invited and insider status to expand invitation to others?
2. What has been the most unexpected invitation that parenting has offered you?
3. What is your best strategy for inviting a love of learning into your child's life?
4. Where and when does fear and anxiety invite themselves into your parenting?
5. All year, we're making space to explore the connections between the monthly themes and our new UU core value of liberating love. What "practices of invitation" might help you and your family better embody liberating love?
6. When and why did you decide to invite faith/spirituality into your family life and parenting?
7. Do you desire to be the home that all the kids/teens are invited to? Why or why not?
8. How has parenting invited you to be more courageous?
9. How has parenting invited you to be more intentional about paying attention and being present?



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.

The Practice of Vision Boards:

Being Intentional About What You Want to Invite in!

For many of us raising children and young teens, September can feel like the start of a new year, sometimes even more so than January. Between the start of the new school year and the beginning of a new church year, all the new paths, new challenges and new relationships can feel overwhelming. One way to gain some calm and grounding is to be intentional about what you want to invite into your life in the coming year.

So, with that in mind, we invite your family to try out the widely-used and widely-loved practice of Vision Boards. You could make one as a whole family or have each family member make their own, or both.

Once done, we invite you to hang them in your home and return to them every so often to see if you are indeed inviting in what you meant to and living into the intentions you set.

To learn more about creating an intention/vision board, click the link below

How to Create an Intention/Vision Board With Your Kids

<https://www.parents.com/how-to-create-a-vision-board-with-kids-8419595>

Some [questions to ask](#) before you start creating:

1. What did we enjoy last year?
2. What do we want to do more of?
3. How do we picture an ideal afternoon, holiday, weekend?
4. What is important to us?
5. What makes us happy?
6. What are the things that make us feel good?
7. What do we want more off in our life this year?
8. What new things do we want to create?
9. Would there be any new places we would like to visit?
10. Any new skills we would like to learn?
11. Any things we would like to become better at?



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!

Inviting in A New Food Experience

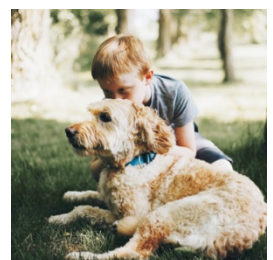
We all have foods we love and comfort foods we turn to again and again. The dishes that invoke special memories or make us feel like we are getting a warm hug when we eat them. But this month, what if you challenge your family to open themselves up and invite in a [new food experience](#)? Maybe that means trying out [a new recipe](#) from a culture different than your own, maybe you learn to properly use chopsticks, or going to a restaurant where the culture is to [not use utensils](#) at all. Maybe you make a list of all the foods you don't normally like and experiment with different ways of preparing them in the hopes of finding one you do like. The opportunities to invite in [new food experiences](#) are endless!

Inviting a Foster Pet into Your Home

Maybe you and your family have been talking about getting a pet for a while but are still on the fence about whether it is the right choice for you. Being a pet owner is a huge commitment with—understandably—a lot of time and living space requirements that not all of us can meet, even if we felt we otherwise would want to do this. In fact, according to the ASPCA, approximately 6.3 million companion animals enter U.S. animal shelters nationwide every year.

But you don't have to jump right away into inviting a pet permanently into your life!

[Fostering](#) or [pet sitting](#) is a wonderful way to open up your home to [an animal in need](#). It's also a great way to see if having a pet permanently in your home truly makes sense for your family.



Blessing of Invitation

Dear fellow caretakers of tiny creatures that invite us to see the world anew every day,

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

That you notice the many ways your children love without qualification,
That this noticing helps you hear the invitations of your own heart,

That you RSVP to life's invitations to pause, catch your breath, and be fully present to what's unfolding because of what you so faithfully planted,

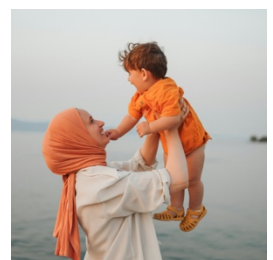
That you forgive yourself for the invitations you missed because of dutiful work,

That you remain awake when your kids call you out to play,
even when there are dishes to do, lawns to mow, and laundry to fold.
(And that you remind yourself that overflowing dishes, overgrown lawns,
and piled-up laundry never stopped the world from spinning just fine.)

That you remember that even the smallest of tasks are trying to offer you treasures,

That you invite in the whispers that want you to know that you, too, are a treasure.

Blessed be, and May it Be So.



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 YouTube music playlist on the monthly theme.

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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Soul Matters

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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's the best thing you have ever been invited to?
What made it so special?

Is it easy or hard for you to invite people to do things with you?

What is something you hope to be invited to this year?

What is an emotion you would love to invite more into your life?

What is a skill you would love to invite into your life this year?

If you could invite anyone from history to spend the day with you,
who would it be, and why?

What's the opposite of invitation?

Is there anything you would not want to be invited to, and why?

What book character would you invite on a picnic?
What would you make them for lunch?

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

Would you prefer to be invited to a party with 100 people
or a party with 10 people? And why?

This year, we're exploring practices that help us live into
our new UU core value of love.
How can invitations be made into acts of love?

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