

Encouraging Children's Spirituality

Eight ideas to help foster children's connection to spirituality.

Spiritual Practice Feature by Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat

Spiritual practices aren't just for adults. Children come naturally to many of the time-honored ways that people use to get closer to the sacred; to family, friends, and community; and to the world around them. They can teach adults about being present, enthusiasm, imagination, play, and wonder—to name just a few. Here are some ideas for how parents and other adults can encourage children's spirituality.

- Give thanks before you eat, not just for the food, but also for everything that contributed to your having this meal--the earth, the rain, the sun, the farmer, the store, the cook, even the cooking equipment. **Gratitude** is an essential spiritual practice.
- When watching television or a video, choose a favorite or interesting character and "step into the story" to see how you would act in his or her place. This exercise uses **imagination** and supports **compassion** for others and **hospitality** toward the media.
- When doing chores, such as picking up toys or putting away the dishes, imagine that you are returning these things to their homes where they will be more comfortable. Reframing chores in this way teaches **reverence** for your surroundings, **kindness**, and **nurturing**.
- Experiment with **silence** by lying on the ground for 15 minutes without saying anything. Pay **attention** to what you are thinking about. Then

notice the reports of your senses of sight and smell. This is the practice of **wonder**.

- Practice **meaning** by choosing symbolic names for your home and your room.
- Create a party for your pet. Indulge the animal with a favorite treat or activity. Name some of the lessons you have learned from living with this **teacher**.
- At bedtime, identify one good thing and one bad thing that has happened during the day. For children, these are times to practice **enthusiasm** and **forgiveness**. For parents, these are opportunities to practice **openness** and **listening**.
- Have a moon-viewing party, complete with special food and costumes appropriate to the season of the year. Talk about the **beauty** of the natural world. Then imagine how the moon sees the world, an exercise that teaches **connections** and the **unity** of all Creation.