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# Nurturing Your Child's Spirit

## Thoughts for Parents on Cultivating the Spiritual Nature of Children

At Mandala, we talk a lot about “nurturing the child: mind, body, and spirit.” Cultivating the spirit is an important part of a Montessori education. But what does this really mean? How can parents bring this into their home and into daily life with their child? I have looked to many sources for the thoughts here.

### What Does “Spirit” Mean? Does It Mean Religion?

This is a puzzling topic for many parents. It brings up questions and uncertainties. The idea of nurturing our child’s “spirit” raises lots of anxiety partly because we don’t know *how*, and partly because we are uncomfortable, even ambivalent, about the issue.

Parents who were wounded by their childhood experiences with organized religion may avoid or resist even thinking about these larger questions. Those without any faith tradition at all often feel completely at a loss.

Parents wonder if “nurturing the spirit” means “teaching a child religion,” rather like music, sports, or dance lessons. Does it require taking a child to church, temple or the mosque? Or, does it mean somehow imparting our beliefs and values to our children?

### Making Meaning

Very simply, spirit means “breath of life.” Spirituality at its essence is how we create meaning in our life, at our core or center. Aline Wolf, in *Nurturing the Spirit In Non-sectarian Classrooms*, has some helpful ways of thinking about this. She emphasizes that spirituality (in all cultures) is that which calls us to reflection, to a sense of awe and wonder. It implies a sacred connection with all of life and a oneness with the universe. It awakens in us a reverence for the earth and all its creatures, and it

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From a Native American ...  
“Spirituality is the essence of our lives. It’s what makes a tree grow and what makes a bird sing, what makes a human smile. ... It’s something you can’t see. It’s the power of the universe.”

encourages our desire to live in harmony. For some, spirituality involves taking a “mystical leap” and being open to an existence that is beyond our sensory and intellectual experience. This may include a belief in a “higher power” or God or life-force.

For all, spirituality involves the recognition of our profound “smallness” as human beings and our call to a higher purpose. We are part of a larger universe and have a responsibility to care for it and for each other. Therefore, “nurturing the spirit” calls us to be our *best*. It means cultivating those highest virtues in ourselves and in our children. Whenever we move beyond self-service and self-satisfaction, or whenever we practice gratitude, compassion, respect, peace-making, or generosity, we are “cultivating the spirit.”

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Spirituality implies a sacred connection with all of life and a oneness with the universe.

This means that every act of carelessness, selfishness, indifference, hatred and violence toward nature or toward other human beings is actually an act against our families & our culture.

Spirituality summons us to the highest of human virtues, such as love, caring, generosity, responsibility for our actions, forgiveness, compassion and openness to one another.

It leads us to sharing rather than accumulating, to cooperation rather than competition, and to peace rather than violence. (A. Wolf)

“Spirituality is not a doctrine that is taught. It is a vital energy... that determines how we create meaning in our lives.”

(B. Galyear)

## Caring for Our Children's Needs

As parents, we must constantly address the needs of the whole child. We attend to the *physical needs* of our child (healthy food, clean air and water, affection, safe shelter) and to their *psychological needs* (love, trust, belonging, self-esteem), but what about the *needs of their spirit*? How many of us even recognize what they are?

### What Are The Spiritual Needs of A Child?

- \* The need for periods of quiet and solitude (to escape the constant noise of chatter, radio, TV, etc.) and to be able to listen to the still small voice within.
- \* The need for opportunities to ponder some of the mysteries of life.
- \* The need to be nourished in ways that leave the door open for wonder, respect and gratitude.
- \* The need to find meaning in their lives, to question why they are here and why the world exists as it does.
- \* The need for spiritual reassurance that what they do matters.
- \* The need to know why it is better to act in one way and not in another.
- \* The need for something beyond themselves and the physical world.
- \* The need to connect to the universe, to a Whole, to a reality that is more than what they see in their lives.

If spiritual nurturing is neglected, a child may grow to be an adult who sees little meaning in life, who is bored or careless with it, or who seeks power, prestige and possessions, without regard for the care of the earth or the well being of other human beings. The serious consequences of ignoring the spirit were pointed out by one of the founders of psychiatry, Carl Jung. He revealed that among his patients over the age of thirty-five, there was not a single one whose problem in its deepest roots was not a spiritual one.

A young child's authentic spirituality is reflected in everything they do. A child shows us the extraordinary in the ordinary.

(Jean Grasso Fitzpatrick)

### How To "Nurture the Spirit" of Children

So what can we do? More than anything, we need to get out of the way of young children and let their wonder and openness lead the way. Jean G. Fitzpatrick believes "the greatest challenge we face is to become attuned to the young child's authentic spirituality, which is still an integrated part of life. Children's exuberant spirituality is reflected in everything they do. A child shows us the extraordinary in the ordinary." We need only put on our 'child eyes' and see the world anew.

Our task as spiritual nurturers becomes easier when we realize that we do not have to instill spirituality in a child, we have only to protect it from being trampled on and to nourish its growth (A. Wolf). We have to shelter our children from the polluting messages of our culture. We have to make room in our children's busy lives for their spirits to thrive. We have to buffer them from intrusions, from the frenetic world, putting boundaries around time and space.

#### ☞ Be Intentional

We think children will get it but they don't always. We have to be intentional and teach our values, whether it is the practice of gratitude or how we make peace within our family. We have to teach children to respect their world and each other. Sometimes, this means they have to experience a momentary discomfort or the denial of an immediate pleasure ("I want it now!") because learning that I am not "all important" is the value we are teaching.

#### ☞ Make Time for Stillness and Reflection

In a society that endorses activity, we would all do well to put more trust in stillness. Take time to pause. Karina Kenison, the mother of two boys, describes her experience with slowing down: "When I come to a stop myself, when I draw a circle of stillness around me, my children are drawn into that peaceful place. We might sit side by side and draw, or gather up a stack of favorite old picture books and read them, make strange creatures out of clay, or just cuddle on the couch and listen to music as darkness falls. There, in that place...we connect with one another at a very deep soul level."

When I clear a quiet space for my family, I make room for our souls to grow.

-Karina Kenison

Try clearing a space for silence in your home. Kenison offers these suggestions: Be conscious of all the different kinds of noise you allow into your life and eliminate any that don't enhance the present moment; Start and end each day with a time of quiet throughout your home; Protect your children from noise overdoses and allow them to grow in silence; Avoid electronic games and toys that talk, beep, or make noises; Begin meals with "quiet bites (a few minutes of centering silence); Enjoy each other's company at meals without the accompaniment of TV; Turn off the soundtrack in your life (the background noise of television or music). Guard your quiet times. Let home be a place where children can find the quiet space they need to reflect and wonder and "make sense of it all."

Wisdom  
begins in wonder.

### ☞ Encourage Wonder

Think about why we are so drawn to infants? Or why the spirit of the very young child is so powerful? Perhaps it is because they are so new and so fresh, so untarnished by experience or not yet smothered by unthinking adults. They still have the wonder about them. They are still close to the universal spirit of creation. We can remind ourselves to stay "awake" to wonder, too. When a child "picks up a worm, pulls apart a daisy or chases a butterfly, she is showing us little miracles of life that we have long since taken for granted" (A. wolf). We must be careful not to trample on or diminish this capacity, but to nourish and encourage a child's openness to discovery.

### ☞ Experience Nature

Give your child time to be in natural places, to experience nature. The encounters with nature that seem to mean the most to children are those that happen without any agenda at all—with time just for discovery. Wonder is nourished by opportunities to observe the intricate workings of nature. With careful encouragement, childhood wonder will flower into a deep reverence for nature that can keep one's spirit alive into old age. Sadly, as contact with nature decreases, a child's capacity for wonder can wither.

Even Maria Montessori, in her time, lamented that children had less contact with nature...

*"In the civilized environment of our society, children live far from nature and have few opportunities of entering into intimate contact with it. Does anyone let them run out when it is raining, take off their shoes when they find pools of water, and let them run about with bare feet when the grass of the meadow is damp with dew?"*

What can you do? Hang bird feeders near your window or out in your yard. Make an outdoor "Quiet Garden." Plant fall bulbs and watch for them in the spring. Walk often in nature. Slow down. Watch. Look. Listen. Create opportunities to go cloud watching, lie under trees, poke in mud puddles, find a bird's nest, notice the beauty of a blossom, listen to the wind, watch worms move, wade in tide pools, and listen to bird calls. Bring nature inside with the leaves, pods, flowers, rocks, or shells you find.

Parents can help children become aware that all of nature moves in cycles. Native Americans have always been mindful of this, making the circle a sacred symbol: "The power of the world always works in

circles and everything tries to be round...the earth is round like a ball... birds make their nests in circles...the sun comes up and goes down again in a circle...the moon does the same and both are round. Even the seasons form a great circle. The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves" (J. Neihardt). A child who understands the marvelous way that nature operates in cycles will eventually see his or her own life as part of this system of cycles, which may then help him feel more comfortable with death, realizing that all life comes to an end so that new life can begin.

### ☞ Be Open to the Big Questions

Young children are naturally curious and open—always asking questions, always wondering about the mysteries of life. We don't need to have all the answers. Instead, our children need us to have some sense of the transcendent—"the sense that there is something more to life than what they perceive with their senses." Aline Wolf writes that children need us "to be able very honestly to honor the big questions of the universe, not by trying to give definitive answers but by acknowledging humbly that there are many aspects of life we cannot understand, even while we keep trying to explore." It's OK to tell our children that we don't know, to say, "I wonder about that, too..." or "What do you think?"

Practice "seeing with the heart."  
Acknowledge the best in each other.  
Practice compassion through empathy,  
kind actions and forgiveness.

### ☞ Model Compassion and Respect

Children learn what they see. All the best ideas in the universe are not as powerful as the small acts of love and kindness we can offer in daily life. When we comfort our children with love and care, we teach them to care for others in return. Through our own loving example, we show the healing way. Making a commitment to the spiritual growth of our children means that we, too, learn to live with gratitude and compassion, moment to moment. Remember that children are spiritual beings and as such, they deserve our respect and reverence. Children who grow up in an atmosphere of thoughtfulness and courtesy become thoughtful and courteous themselves.

## LOVELIGHT

Light a votive candle to show your child how her inner heartlight shines brightly.

### ∞ Teach A Child About His Own Inner Goodness

You can help your child to be in touch with his or her own inner core of goodness. Some Montessori teachers call this a child's "lovelight" or "heartlight." When we are loving to ourselves and to others, our heartlight is burning brightly. For young children, symbols or visuals often help them to better understand such concepts. One way to help a child think about their inner goodness is to symbolize it with a lighted votive candle. You might say, "*Our lovelight (heartlight) shines brightly*

*when we have good feelings of love. It does not shine brightly when we are angry or jealous.*" Helping children become aware of the core of love that rests inside each one of them is one of the most important aspects of nurturing spirituality and teaching peace.

Knowing peace  
at home,  
we bring peace  
into the world.

-Kenison

### ∞ Provide Peace at Home

In order to model peaceful behavior for our children, we must first have peace within ourselves. Can we dare to take an honest look at our own attitudes and behaviors? Are we preaching peace but waging war at home? Are we open and loving towards our children but angry and resentful towards others? Our children learn not only from what we say, but even more so from what we do and who we are. If we are hypocritical in our own behavior, we cannot claim to be builders of peace. Our ability to call forth the peaceful spiritual nature of children grows as we connect with our own peaceful center. One of the greatest gifts we can give children is growing up in a home that feels secure and at peace. If children feel peace in their hearts, they can more easily relate peacefully to those around them.

## A PEACE ROSE

Consider using a "Peace Rose" to help children problem-solve and resolve conflicts.

One creative peace-teaching idea is the Peace Rose. Buy a single silk rose and keep it in a vase as a peace symbol for simple conflict resolution. When two children are having a problem, say, "*I think we need to get the Peace Rose and take turns talking.*" First, give one child the Peace Rose, and ask him to hold it while he tells what happened and how he feels about it. (Teach the use of "I Messages"--No name calling allowed.) Then have the other child hold the rose and express her feelings. When they reach a solution or simply get over their difficulty, have them both put their hands on the stem of the rose and say, "*We declare peace.*"

### ∞ Teach Gratitude

"Gratitude is the way of mindfulness," writes Simone Daleo. "When we begin to see and name the gifts we are given daily in our everyday lives, we plant the seeds of gratitude, which will last a lifetime." When we pause long enough to give thanks for what we have right now, we teach our children a valuable lesson. We help them accept that they can't have everything they want, but they do have everything they *need* for today. "By helping children develop a daily practice of giving thanks for each new morning, each still, dark night, for the people who love and care for them, for the great abundance in their lives, we are enabling them to be 'mindful gardeners.' They will then have the inner peace needed to cultivate the seeds of love, compassion, joy, beauty and gratitude throughout their lives."

### ∞ Develop Rituals

No matter how busy we are, we can find meaning and renewal in those moments that are available to us. We can come together in an intimate way, even at the end of a long, draining day, if we are willing to be fully present to our children...to take time to respond from the heart (K. Kenison). We can teach them the value of a deep breath, of a spiritual pause, if we take the time to learn it ourselves. Rituals help us stop and take just such a breath in the midst of our hectic lives.

"I finally learned that dinner - at least at this stage of our lives—is not even really *about* food.

It is about love, and about learning how to be together."

(Kenison)

### Share Family Meals

Meals together are difficult to achieve for many families today. The family meal has been threatened by the pace and complexity of modern life. But sharing a meal is still one of the most significant ways we have "nurturing the spirit" (as well as the body). Sharing a meal is a coming together of family and friends and a chance to give thanks for the bounty of the earth and the blessings we have received. For children, it is one of the few times they have of experiencing everyone being together. Even the simplest of meals can have the spirit of celebration.

Our sons and daughters learn the hearth's powerful lessons right here, in their own homes, at their own tables.

Dinnertime can easily become one more demand. It's easy to skip the frills when it comes to feeding children. We're rushed and it seems like they don't much care...so we do what's easy and get on with the business of life.

But we are teaching powerful lessons right here at our table. Try putting energy into preparing a simple meal and serving it with love. When we cultivate a festive mood with small touches, our meals become something more, a place to share and reconnect. For our children, these become sacred, irreplaceable moments of coming together on this earth, under this roof, in this family.

### Make the Table a “Sacred Space”

Don’t wait for the holidays or special events to set the table in a sacred manner. Author Morgan Dileo reminds us that any meal can be lifted to a feeling of loving care with a vase of flowers or a seasonal centerpiece, using ‘the good dishes,’ bringing out a table cloth or cloth napkins, or adding whatever feels right to create a harmonious sense of grace or reverence. Let children help, too. Even a newly picked dandelion in a jelly jar of water can be a special focal point on the table. Think about using candles to bring even more loveliness. There is something very special in the act of bringing light to the table with candles. Candlelight always suggests warmth and love and the light of spirit.

### Some Ideas to Inspire You to Return to the Simple Pleasures of Mealtime...

- Few of us can manage a family dinner every night of the week, but we can surely commit ourselves to one or two. Be flexible...do Friday Night Treats or Sunday breakfast, instead of dinner, but honor your commitment to gather your family to nourish bodies and souls.
- Create a mood of warmth and celebration at your table. Light candles, arrange place settings with care, pick a bouquet of flowers. We use candles throughout the fall and winter and usually cloth napkins and placemats, too. Children love ceremony and, given the opportunity, will generally rise to the occasion.
- Agree that TVs and stereos and other background noise will be turned off so that you can tune into each other.
- Let the answering machine pick up the phone. If you treat your time together as a special occasion, your children will, too.
- Keep conversation to subjects that invite everyone’s participation. This is not the time to air the day’s grievances. Enjoy one another’s company instead. Our family has had great fun with a couple of decks of Table Talk cards.
- Figure out what’s most important to you at mealtime and try to achieve that. Keep the ground rules firm and simple. I require my children to try one bite of everything, to refrain from complaints about the fare, and to carry their plates to the sink when they’re through. Be realistic in your expectations and relaxed about the things beyond your control. Strive for harmony.
- Excuse the children when they have finished. Just because children are capable of eating a meal in ten minutes doesn’t mean that *we* have to.
- Be spontaneous. Have tea with little china cups and tiny sandwiches on a rainy afternoon, and let go of dinner later.
- Invite guests to dinner. A guest is a surefire way to turn an ordinary meal into a celebration. Children love to make room at the table for one or two more, and they are as delighted to have *their* friends over for dinner as we adults are to have ours. When we open our doors and our arms to others—both to children and adults—we express our love and caring through our deeds.

- Karina Kenison, *Mitten Strings For God: Reflections for Mothers in a Hurry*

### Take a Moment for Gratefulness

Too often we take for granted that food is precious, that food is a gift connecting us to the bounty of nature. Perhaps then, the most significant element of a meal is the sacred moment before the meal begins, the time known traditionally for “saying grace” or “giving thanks.” Many of us have discarded our old formal ways of giving thanks, yet we still long to bring a sense of appreciation and peace into our children’s lives. Maybe we want to consider teaching our children to stop for a moment before we eat to pause and give thanks.

Some families hold hands around the table to create a sacred space. Others bow their heads, while others ask one child sharing a

Bless this food.  
Bless these people.  
Bless this house.  
Bless this world.  
We give thanks for this food.  
We give thanks for each other.  
We give thanks for our lives.

(John Robbins, *May All Be Fed*)

### IDEAS for FAMILY BLESSINGS

- ***A Grateful Heart: Daily Blessings for the Evening Meal from Buddha to the Beatles.***  
M.J. Ryan, 1994.
- ***One Hundred Graces: Mealtime Blessings.***  
Marcia and Jack Kelly, 1992.

to light a candle. Giving thanks can be as simple as moment of silence, inviting each family member to say “thank you for one thing today,” reciting a poem, saying a blessing, or singing a song together.

Children love these traditions. Rituals are intrinsically soothing to children because they give them the comfort of continuity and being safely held in the arms of something larger than themselves. As parents, most of us long for a ways of having a sense of appreciation and peace take hold for a moment in our busy lives.

*Let us bless the source of life that brings forth  
bread from the Earth.  
Let our lives be a blessing to the Earth that  
sustains us, and to all the creatures that, like  
us, call this planet home.*

(John Dickman)

Earth who gives us this food,  
Sun who makes it ripe and good,  
Dearest earth and dearest sun,  
We'll not forget what you have done.  
Blessings on this earth and each other.  
Amen.

(K. Kenison, *Mitten Strings*)

Bon Appetit!  
You may eat!  
(From Mandala)

## ☞ Celebrate Often

Celebrate as often as you can. Share your enthusiasm for the world around you. Any day can be a cause for celebration: First Snowfall Day, Rainy Boots Day, Quarter Moon Night, Lost Tooth Day, Butterfly Morning Breakfast, Everyday Earth Day, Popcorn and Pajamas Night, Peace Picnic, Summer Lawn Tea, Pumpkin Harvest Dinner, New Shoes Day, or Sunday Dinner. Create your own traditions, ceremonies, blessings and songs. Share food, light a candle, share stories, sing a song. Our celebrations give children a sense of themselves in relation to the movement of the earth and in relationship to one another and to spirit.

## ☞ Create Community

Find a way to build a community that fits for you. For a child, being held in the arms of a family is wonderful, but being held by a community is even better. Being part of a community is being part of a wider circle, something larger, something greater. A child experiences his or her community as a “safety net” one step beyond her parents. Remember the old African saying that “it takes a village to raise a child”? There is great truth in that. A community is made up of people who come together for a common purpose in a spirit of helpfulness and harmony. For some, this is a community of friends or neighbors, for others it may be built around interests, sports, or hobbies. Others find a faith community that meets this need through shared religious practices. Community is both felt and experienced by a child. Community breeds helpfulness, strength, and intimacy from knowing others well—all qualities of the “spirit.”

## ☞ Be of Service

Morgan Dileo says, “*to be of service is the path of love in action.*” Teaching a child that we each need to help—without expecting a reward—is an important spiritual message. We need to help because it is our human responsibility to take care of one another. Children first learn about service by being part of a caring family. We show them in our moment-to-moment tasks how families take care of one another. A good question to practice asking one another is “*What can I do to help?*” This practical approach to helping others draws on a child’s natural love of real work and sense of pride in accomplishing meaningful tasks in the world around them.

To be of  
service is the  
path of  
love in action.

Young children can help in many small ways, but often we resist the time it takes to teach them. So stop and teach your child. Point out ways he can help: Picking up a littered soda can, giving away a toy or coat that is no longer used, helping to set the table or make the salad, talking to a fussy baby, taking food to the food bank. Sometimes just being with someone is helping. Children who are expected to contribute feel better about themselves and their place in their family because they feel needed and important.

Our children are not always shown that to consider the good of the whole and to consider the needs of others is an important step in being a responsible human being. Children need to be reminded of the need to help—without judgment or without the expectation of a reward—simply because it is our human responsibility to take care of one another. By becoming active helpers in a world needing our attention, children learn to feel the powerful presence of Love, through action and work.

—M. Dileo

Read books about people who help others. Talk about people who have made a difference—in the news or in history. Do something to be of service in your community. Children watch with keen awareness what we do for others. Big or small, our gestures of goodwill speak louder than our words. If children at a young age see how we help one another, they will become aware of how their actions can help to meet the needs of the larger community of which they are a

part. They will develop their own inner awareness, which will tell them that we are all responsible for taking care of one another.

“These are the years  
to nourish the habit  
of caring...  
Even very young  
children care.”

Sr. A. Porta, Montessori Teacher

### ☞ Practice Care for the Earth

Teach children to care for their planet by recycling and reusing. I love the way the Aline Wolf puts it: “We can never throw anything ‘away’ because there is no such thing as ‘away.’ There is only the universe—home to us all.” When we model care for our planet, we teach children to value the earth and to be aware of how they treat it. Even young children can be taught awareness by asking, “*How did you help Mother Earth today?*” Turning off running water, turning out a light, using real cups (not Styrofoam), putting used paper in the recycle bin, etc. are all ways children can participate as ‘earth helpers.’ Ecological literacy has a spiritual component, which is the awareness of the interconnectedness of *all* of life.

### ☞ Encourage Your Child to Follow His “Passion of Interest”

Joseph Campbell speaks of the importance of “personal allurements” in finding our mission in life and being able to “live to our potentiality.” How do we help our children to do this? By encouraging them to “follow their bliss.” This means giving children the opportunity to follow their passionate interests as they develop—even if they are different than ours.

A child’s “passion of interest” may eventually lead to meaningful work, but parents, teachers, peers, or culture can easily squelch this desire. When Maria Montessori talked about nourishing the child’s spirit, she intended that we work to preserve this delicate inner core in children. She believed this core held the secret of the “cosmic task” that would make each child’s life meaningful and satisfying. This means that when we encourage children to act from their authentic center, rather than being swayed by passing fads or peer groups, we guide them on the road to finding their place in the universe. We give them a beginning nudge on their spiritual quest to answer the questions, “What am I? What is my task in this wonderful universe?”

### ☞ Appreciate Beauty

Children have an innate appreciation of beauty. They first learn about it by interacting with and appreciating the natural world. Open your child’s awareness to the colors and beauty surrounding him. Nourish your child’s expression of beauty from within by giving opportunities for making art as a personal expression. Art is one way we nurture our spirits. The pure joy of the creative impulse is connected in some mysterious way to order and harmony in the universe.

### ☞ Practice Mindfulness

Mindfulness is conscious awareness. It is the process of paying attention, moment to moment, to one’s thoughts and surroundings—without judgment or reaction, but with gratitude and joy. Children (lucky them!) are already in a state of heightened awareness! We just need to focus their sensitivity in a way that encourages them to appreciate and respect.

Gratitude is the way of mindfulness. When we practice mindfulness ourselves, our children become more mindful. Even when doing a mundane task with our child, we can take a moment. Whether we are pouring milk into glass, or listening to our child’s experience, we can enrich the connection by giving our full attention. When we take a moment amid ordinary life to become more conscious of the mood we are creating, to live more thoughtfully, we infuse these fleeting moments of togetherness with love and meaning.

#### TAKE A BREATH

When I say to my boys,  
“Let’s take a deep breath,”  
I am guiding them into a safe  
haven, a place where they can  
release their pain and anger and  
come back to center again.”

(K. Kenison)

### ☞ Breathe Deeply

Breathing is the essence of life. Each time we pause to breathe deeply with our children, we are affirming their life forces and celebrating our miraculous existence on this planet. Teaching children to breathe deeply is one way to help them develop mindfulness and focus their awareness. Breathing calms both us and our children—and brings us into the present moment.

### ☞ Tell Your Own Stories

Years ago, all parents told stories to their children—both to entertain them and to teach them about the world’s complexities. Sadly, we lost the art of storytelling when we lost that sort of open-ended time with our children, the reflecting, wondering, watching time that gives rise to stories. Today, our children hear most of their stories from the media, who need to make a profit by entertaining us. While these stories may capture our children’s attention, they do not stir their senses or open their hearts. Stories told by the media, says family therapist Mary Pipher, “induce children to want good things, instead of good lives.”

When we tell stories to our children, we reweave our connections to holy wonder—connections that are often broken down by our culture's surfeit of noise and activity. The stories told and retold in our family over the years have become part of us all. (K.K.)

Storytelling blends the wonder of imagination with the warmth of shared experience. The words "Once upon a time..." are still magic. Author Karina Kenison encourages us to tell our own stories to our children, because when we do, we invite them to create their own inner pictures, which connects them to their rich internal world. The stories that mothers and fathers can tell are "food for the soul, and they nourish us, the storytellers, as well. We need only create a listening space, tune into the world around us, and have faith that our own inner storytellers will guide us."

Tell stories about your

childhood, tell family legends, or make up fantasy creations of your own. Be assured that your children will hold those stories as sacred memories for years to come.

### ☞ Live By Your Own Values

Know yourself. Know what you believe in. Rediscover what is meaningful and important in your own life. Take time for quiet, for introspection, for a few meditative moments. If you really want to know how to take care of nurturing your child's spirit, you need only take care of your own spiritual life. Our children learn by imitation. If we live in a way that is consistent with our values and beliefs, we give our children a great gift. When we connect them to something larger than ourselves, we create "a safe and loving place in which their own souls can unfurl and bloom."

☞  
Cultivate in yourself the qualities  
you desire for your children.

Raising children is a daunting responsibility for anyone trying to shape a family life outside the realm of commercialism and the media. But every time we reaffirm our own values, we instill values in our children. When we mother from the soul, according to our inner wisdom, we teach our children to trust their own higher selves. When we stand by our convictions, we teach them strength. When we speak lovingly from the heart, we teach our children how to love in return. When we recognize and honor the divine in ourselves and in others, we support our children's spirituality.

-Karina Kenison

## Our Favorite Books for Nurturing the Child's Spirit

Do you want to read some beautiful books that nourish you as a parent and inspire you to nourish your child? (Note: These are not "religious" books. They simply offer a vision of how to create deeper values in our children & our lives.)

Here are two of our favorites that have inspired our staff and parents both. Don't let the "curriculum" part stop you. There are wonderful ideas in here for parents, as well as teachers. Just reading these books is food for the spirit!

- ☞ *Curriculum of Love: Cultivating the Spiritual Nature of Children* by Morgan Simone Daleo, Grace Publishing, 1996.
- ☞ *Nurturing the Spirit in Non-sectarian Classrooms* by Aline Wolf, Parent-Child Press, 1996.

This is my all time favorite! It is a quietly beautiful little book that offers a new way of seeing...something almost miraculous in this 'crazy age of ambitious parenting.' Here is a clear vision for slowing down our hectic lives, rich with down-to-earth ideas that support what we want most—time with our families. (The title comes from Kenison's child.)

- ☞ *Mitten Strings for God* by Katrina Kenison, Time Warner Books, 2000.

This is my second all-time favorite "gem" in this genre. It's a practical parenting book (how to raise self-reliant children) from a "values" perspective. It's a small book with a lot of depth. Written by a psychotherapist who was deeply concerned about the children/families she was seeing in her practice, it draws on the wisdom of the Jewish traditions to build a framework for parenting in a culture of competition and materialism.

- ☞ *The Blessings of a Skinned Knee* by Wendy Mogel, Ph.D. Penguin Compass, 2001.

Here is another recommendation from a mother who is on the same path!

- ☞ *My Monastery Is A Minivan* by Denise Roy, Loyola Press, 2001.

These last books look interesting...but I haven't reviewed them yet. (Feedback anyone?)

- ☞ *10 Principles for Spiritual Parenting: Nurturing your Child's Soul* by Mimi Doe, Marsha Walch.
- ☞ *Busy But Balanced: Practical and Inspirational Ways to Create a Calmer, Closer, Family* by Mimi Doe.

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