

# Action Ideas for the Children's Sabbaths Weekend and Throughout the Year



The actions that you plan for the Children's Sabbath weekend and for the year that follows are an essential part of the Children's Sabbath. As important as the worship experiences and educational sessions are, it is vital to plan actions that will help translate that prayer and inspiration, that awareness and information into new hands-on service and justice-seeking advocacy to end the gun violence that takes the lives of 21 children every three days and to end poverty and give families the tools and support for economic security and well-being.

So, are you ready to plan? There are two kinds of action to plan for your Children's Sabbath:

- Hands-on service and advocacy activities for the Children's Sabbath weekend itself.
- Actions that can be carried out throughout the year to come to make a lasting difference for children.

Let's get started!

## Tips for Planning Activities

As you plan activities for the Children's Sabbath weekend and for the year to come, keep the following tips in mind:

**First, offer a range of activities focusing on raising awareness, hands-on service, and advocacy.** Making a difference for children requires all three kinds of effort! It also enables people to choose activities based on their particular skills and interests. The action ideas below are organized in these three categories, so try to select one or more from each.

**Second, plan some activities that can be completed on the Children's Sabbath weekend** (such as assembling care packages for children going into foster care) **and some that will lead people into long-term commitments** (such as signing up volunteers to do outreach and enrollment for children's public health coverage programs or work with a mentoring or after-school program once a week).

**Third, plan activities that will engage all ages.** For example, if there is a table to write letters to elected officials, provide crayons and markers so that young children can draw pictures to enclose, or have them dictate their letters to an older child or adult.

**Fourth, use the Children's Sabbath to reinforce existing congregational programs that serve children, particularly programs that promote justice and nonviolence and work to end poverty** (for example, you could highlight accomplishments, recruit new people to help, or solicit donations) while introducing new opportunities to serve children and families, seek justice, protect children, and lift up the next generation.

**Finally, be sure you are prepared to guide people in the activities so that they understand the connection between the worship and the action.** You may want to provide a preview of the activities on a bulletin insert or during the announcement time in worship. During the activity period, it works best to have several people at each activity who are prepared to explain and guide participation.

**Please Note:** The kinds of activities that are appropriate and permissible at various points during the Children's Sabbaths weekend vary depending on the religious tradition of a place of worship. As you read through the suggested activities, you should select those that are appropriate for your tradition or modify the actions to make them so. Remember that the whole weekend, from Friday morning through Sunday night, is part of the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* celebration, so some activities that would not be appropriate immediately following your time of worship could be planned for another day or time during the weekend. Additionally, activities can and should be planned for the year to follow, so you can plan accordingly. You know what is best for your place of worship.

## Action Ideas

### Host a "Turn In Guns and Turn Off Violence" Day

Host a day when people can turn in unusable or unwanted guns for supermarket gift certificates, as did John Wesley United Methodist Church in Falmouth, Massachusetts (See box below). Coordinate with your local police department to collect the guns and, if appropriate, seek approval from your local government.

In addition to encouraging people to "turn in guns," invite all ages to "turn off violence." Invite children, teens, and adults to turn in violent video games, toys that encourage the simulation of violence, and movies and music that glorify violence. In preparation for the turn-in, encourage parents to talk with their children about their family's values (spiritual and other) that support nonviolence and why your family will not buy, watch, or use items that suggest that violence is entertaining.

Your congregation may decide to offer incentives for the turn-in, such as supermarket gift certificates for guns that are turned in, and books and games that celebrate peace and cooperation to exchange for the toys and other items children donate. Alternatively, plan on-site story time and cooperative games and a meal open to all who come to turn in guns and turn off violence.

**Cape Cod Times**

January 26, 2013

By Sean Teehan

## **Falmouth church hosting gun turn-in program**

10 a.m.-3 p.m. Feb 2,

John Wesley United Methodist Church, 270 Gifford St. Falmouth

Donations: Through PayPal or by check payable to John Wesley United Methodist Church-Falmouth Gun Buyback Program.

FALMOUTH — Volunteers at John Wesley United Methodist Church hope their efforts will contribute to a safer town and promote gun safety.

The church is hosting a gun turn-in program Feb. 2, offering people a chance to trade unusable or unwanted guns for supermarket gift certificates.

“There’s so many ways I think society needs to address gun violence and gun ownership,” said parishioner Tiffany Van Mooy. She approached the Rev. David Calhoun, a minister there, with the idea a few days after a gunman opened fire at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., killing 20 children and six adults last month.

Church members already sent 300 stuffed “prayer bears” to Newtown, but the turn-in program seemed like a good way to do more, Calhoun said.

The program will offer \$25 certificates for BB guns or inoperable guns; \$100 certificates for revolvers, shotguns, semiautomatic guns and rifles; and \$200 certificates for assault weapons.

Framed pictures of Calhoun’s three children sit on the desk and shelves at his office within the high-ceiling church on Gifford Street. With all his children in the Falmouth school system, the Sandy Hook massacre hit home for him. “We really are hoping for a safer Falmouth,” Calhoun said.

After gaining the blessings of the town, church council and the Falmouth Police Department (which agreed to accept and dispose of the guns), church members and other volunteers began seeking donations.

“It’s really a grass-roots effort,” said Calhoun, who noted that the gift cards to Stop & Shop and Shaws were paid for completely from donations. About \$2,000 has been raised so far, Calhoun said.

Two Falmouth police officers will collect the weapons, Falmouth police Lt. Brian Reid said.

“We were happy to get on board and throw our support behind it,” Reid said Thursday.

Data from the state Executive Office of Public Safety and Security show that as of Dec. 3, 1,677 people in Falmouth possessed Class A licenses to carry firearms. The Class A is the only state license that permits residents to carry loaded and concealed handguns.

Neither Calhoun nor Van Mooy would predict how many people might respond. A gun turn-in program in Yarmouth netted 72 guns earlier this month.

<http://www.capecodonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20130126/NEWS/301260315&cid=sitesearch>

### Convene Study Circles in Your Place of Worship or in the Community

Start a study circle that will meet regularly to read and respond to publications about children and guns. Two articles with discussion questions are found in the Educational Resources section of the manual and downloaded at [www.childrensdefense.org/faith](http://www.childrensdefense.org/faith). *Wrong Place, Wrong Time: Trauma and Violence in the Lives of Young Black Men* by John Rich is another good resource for a study circle or book group. Your religious tradition may also have educational resources prepared on the topics of violence, peace-making, and other related subjects.

### Engage Your Members in Speaking Out for Justice Throughout the Year

Set up a table in a central location with information about sensible gun safety legislation and other policy opportunities to protect children, reduce violence, and care for their health and mental health (See the Children's Defense Fund's federal policy agenda for specific recommendations.). Make copies of these materials along with contact information for your members of Congress and the White House. Organize efforts beginning this weekend to contact policymakers persistently until they take real action to protect children, not guns. Contact your members of Congress directly by visiting [www.childrensdefense.org/ProtectChildrenNotGuns](http://www.childrensdefense.org/ProtectChildrenNotGuns)

### Create a Resource and Referral Booklet

Compile a booklet that provides families with information about where they can turn for support to deal with concerns including depression, suicidal thoughts, mental health needs, substance abuse, domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, and bullying. In addition to making sure that individuals and families that need these services are aware of them and can access them, encourage members of your place of worship to donate time, money, or items to support these resources and services. Make the list available to congregation and community members.

### Respond to Children Suffering From Trauma, Grief, and Other Needs

If your place of worship has staff skilled in counseling, offer sessions for children suffering from grief or trauma related to violence, injury, loss, and other traumas. You could also offer a suitable room in your place of worship for a counselor from a community agency to meet with children and families individually or in support groups. Find ways that your staff skilled in counseling can help meet the needs of schools with children who are suffering from grief and other trauma. Ensure that good books for children that address death, grief, and trauma are available in the classrooms or library of your place of worship.

### Serve

Create a list of service opportunities for members of your place of worship that will help reduce violence and promote conflict resolution, peacemaking, and good mental health. Options may include after-school programs, in-school programs, juvenile detention facilities, crisis hotlines, and family support programs.

### Display Posters that Raise Awareness About Gun Violence

Order gun violence awareness and prevention posters, produced for CDF by the award-winning advertisement firm Fallon Worldwide, from CDF's webstore. You can also order "Protect Children, Not Guns" buttons and bumper stickers at our store for your group. Share them with your friends on social networks. "Like" CDF on Facebook and follow us on Twitter @ChildDefender.

### Engage Youths in Countering the Culture of Violence

Plan a special youth program on changing the culture of violence. Create a safe, supportive place for youths to talk about the glamorization of violence in our culture—including video games, music, movies, and more. Let them take the initiative in developing solutions to de-glamorize violence and promote positive

values of peacemaking. Perhaps plan a “fishbowl” discussion where parents sit in a ring around the outside and simply listen to the discussion of the young people on the inside. Adults may be surprised to find out how much they can learn by listening to a candid conversation. Plan “field trips” to local toy stores and examine what is being sold. Speak up and work to have violence-oriented toys removed from the available stock. Examine other venues where violence-as-entertainment may be marketed or offered, from hotel game rooms to health club play rooms.

### Create a Symbol to Mark Your Place of Worship's Commitment to Nonviolence

Possibilities include:

- Creating a “peace sculpture”;
- Installing a wooden Peace Pole decorated with the words for “peace” in English, Spanish, Arabic, Hebrew, and other languages;
- Engaging the congregation in folding origami “peace cranes” and displaying them in your place of worship (perhaps hanging them from a “fig tree,” in reference to the passage from Micah 4:1-5);
- Holding a Peace Poster event where all ages create posters proclaiming your place of worship's commitment to nonviolence, perhaps building on the theme “Turning Swords Into Plowshares” if appropriate for your tradition; and
- Creating a banner or yard sign that identifies your place of worship as a gun-free, nonviolent, peace-loving community.

#### The Philadelphia Inquirer

January 21, 2013

By Bob Warner

### In Chestnut Hill, a faith-based memorial to gun victims

Heeding God's Call, a faith-based movement against gun violence, has installed a strong visual memorial along Germantown Avenue in Chestnut Hill - a field of 331 crosses on the front lawn of a Presbyterian church, each holding a T-shirt with the name, age, and date when one of Philadelphia's murder victims was killed in 2012. “Philadelphia - highest major-city gun death rate,” reads a sign facing drivers on the neighborhood's main thoroughfare. “Where are you, Mayor Nutter?” About 60 volunteers from three area churches built the memorial Saturday, fashioning small crosses from PVC piping, using markers to inscribe a name on each shirt, and lining up the crosses in front of the church.

“I think we were all amazed at how powerful it was as a memorial,” said Bryan Miller, executive director of Heeding God's Call, described as “a faith-based and grassroots movement to end gun violence” on its website, [www.heedinggodscall.org](http://www.heedinggodscall.org). The organization has been active in the Philadelphia area for months, holding occasional demonstrations - described as “public witnesses” - at gun shops and gun murder sites. It is planning a prayer vigil Wednesday in the state Capitol.

The group is promoting a voluntary code of conduct for gun dealers, developed by Mayors Against Illegal Guns, the group founded in 2006 by 15 mayors, including New York City's Michael Bloomberg and Boston's Thomas Menino. The code - already in place for several years at Walmart stores - includes 10 points designed to curb illegal gun trafficking. The list includes: videotaping all retail firearms transactions, maintaining a computerized log of any gun-related crimes where the gun

has been traced back to the retailer, accepting only government-issued photo ID cards, and performing background checks on all employees involved in selling or handling firearms.

Miller said the memorial would likely stay in place about two weeks in front of the Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill, then move to the other two area churches - the Episcopal Church of St. Martin-in-the-Fields and the First Presbyterian Church of Germantown - whose members adopted the work as a service project in honor of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. "It takes a large lawn to fit it. We weren't really sure how big it would be," Miller said. "Eventually we hope to take it on a tour of the city."

[http://articles.philly.com/2013-01-23/news/36486694\\_1\\_gun-violence-mayors-against-illegal-guns-chestnut-hill](http://articles.philly.com/2013-01-23/news/36486694_1_gun-violence-mayors-against-illegal-guns-chestnut-hill)

### Launch a "Plowshares" Initiative in Your Place of Worship and/or Community

Emergency food pantries often distribute highly processed foods and have limited supplies of fresh produce. Unfortunately, fresh produce is also in short supply in many urban areas that have poorly stocked corner markets instead of supermarkets. As a congregation, come up with a "Plowshares" initiative to provide fresh produce for children in poverty. Possibilities include: partnering with schools serving primarily low-income children to create schoolyard gardens; donating produce to emergency food pantries; planting a vegetable garden on the congregation's grounds and donating the harvest to families in need; and creating a farmers' market in the parking lot of a congregation situated in an urban area (your own or in partnership with another congregation) to make fresh produce at reasonable prices available to families who would otherwise have difficulty purchasing it.

### Host a Forum or Series on Ending Gun Violence and Child Poverty

Invite a panel of speakers to address different facets of the topics. For the section on ending gun violence, invite speakers who can address sensible gun legislation, myths and facts about gun violence, domestic violence, bullying, and unmet mental health needs. For the section on ending poverty, invite speakers who can address preparing children for positive, productive futures through early childhood development, strong schools, job training, and family income concerns including job training and employment, a living wage, safety net programs, the Earned Income Tax Credit, and affordable housing and health coverage. Encourage each speaker to talk about the problems, solutions, and ways that people can help. Possible speakers include: police officers, families affected by gun violence, domestic violence, or bullying, mental health professionals, community health care providers, teachers, school administrators, students, child care providers, Head Start teachers, parents (both those who work outside the home and in it), health care providers, and staff or volunteers from an after-school program, and legislators. In addition to hearing from professionals working in these areas, when possible and appropriate, arrange to hear from the real "experts": those who are personally affected by the issue (such as parents, grandparents and other relatives raising children, or youths). Also, consider inviting legislators to serve as panelists or to respond to what the panelists present.

**Pittsburgh Tribune-Review**

February 19, 2013

By Tony LaRussa

## **Squirrel Hill synagogue hosts forum on gun violence**

Holding gun owners responsible for reporting lost and stolen weapons, instituting universal background checks and banning assault weapons and high-capacity magazines were among the recommendations offered as solutions to gun violence during a forum in Squirrel Hill on Monday night.

“Stop the Killing — A Forum on Ending Gun Violence” drew nearly 150 people to the Temple Sinai synagogue.

Richard Carrington, executive director of the community group Voices Against Violence, used his personal experiences to help illustrate the toll gun violence has had on the community.

“Since 2000, I have been to 164 funerals of young black men that I have known personally,”

Carrington said. “Of the 164 funerals ... not one of those young men was killed with a legal gun. They were not able to track it back to anyone and not able to verify where those guns came from.”

Dr. Jennifer Wolford of the Child Advocacy Center at Children's Hospital in Lawrenceville discussed the enormity of the problem, saying that about 17,000 children suffer nonfatal gun wounds each year, according to the Children's Defense Fund.

Wolford cited 2009 statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that found 2,251 children — six each day — died from gun violence in the United States.

Her personal encounters with children who were victims of gun violence include treating a 3-year-old boy who accidentally shot himself in the face with a handgun in the home of a baby-sitter, and a 9-year-old boy who was accidentally shot in the abdomen when his 17-year-old brother removed a handgun from his waistband.

Kerry O'Donnell, president of the Falk Foundation, which has been studying incidences of gun violence, made a case for enacting laws that hold gun owners responsible for properly securing their weapons by noting that many gun deaths occur with weapons that are easily accessible to children or are stolen from homes and cars.

“We believe that the silver bullet here is to hold gun owners more responsible,” she said.

Several public officials, including state Sen. Jay Costa, D-Forest Hills, city Councilmen Bill Peduto and Bruce Kraus and city Controller Michael Lamb, were on hand to outline efforts at the state and local level to address gun violence.

<http://triblive.com/news/alleggheny/3506641-74/gun-violence-weapons#axzz2SjJ0muK1>

### Pray with Clay

Set up a table with clay and the invitation to “Pray with your clay. Let it become all your hopes for peace, justice, and a loving world for our children,” as did Congregations Concerned for Children (CCC) of the Minneapolis Council of Churches at a multi-faith Children’s Sabbath celebration many years ago. Arrange to have the clay “prayers” displayed for the congregation to view for several weeks before individuals who created them take the clay pieces home. CCC later wrote this prayer: “We prayed that afternoon with clay, Lord—we work now with our minds, our actions, and our votes. May the spirit of that afternoon of prayer stay with us as we go forth in the world. May we truly become ‘children of God’ as we together sculpt a better world for all God’s Children. Amen.” (From *Weaving Together the Word of God and the Voices of Children: Worship Resource for Violence Prevention III*, 1995)

### Introduce Peace Circles and Restorative Justice Practices into Your Place of Worship’s Children and Youth Programs and to Your Community’s Schools

“Peace Circles” are a growing and valuable way to teach children skills for communication and conflict resolution that have been successfully used in congregations and schools. Visit [www.PeacePower.info](http://www.PeacePower.info) to learn more, and read below for just two examples of how they are in place in a church and a school.

Medill Reports - Chicago, Northwestern University

Feb 18, 2010

By Allison Clark

### Peace circles provide safe place for troubled youth to express themselves

Every Wednesday night a group of young men, most of whom have been in juvenile detention centers, gather and speak in a safe place away from violence in the streets. The Precious Blood Ministry’s peace circle gives them this setting in the Back of the Yards. Here approximately a dozen youth can set aside their differences and speak honestly without judgment.

“It’s a good way to gather people so [they] can speak their truth and feel safe,” said the Rev. Dave Kelly, a peace circle facilitator for Precious Blood.

In these circles, the core values of respect and confidentiality help ease social tension in the Back of the Yards neighborhood, which is divided by gang territories and violence, Kelly said.

“We’re interested in bringing people together so they can see each other in a different way,” Kelly said. “When we know each other, we know we’re not enemies.”

Many of the circle’s youth are from an unstable family life and face problems with homelessness, gang violence, poverty and school, said Mike Donovan, youth worker at Precious Blood. The circles also try to help the young men share their stories so they don’t feel alone in their struggles. They do so by asking questions such as: who do you look up to, what superhero would you like to be in your community and what problem would you solve, and what is your biggest dream.



“Doing this peace circle, I’ve been able to express myself and come up with ways to help me fix my problems,” said Anthony Ricks, 21, a peace circle member. “I can learn from others’ mistakes and they can learn from mine. It’s a give and take situation.”

The challenges these men face are not light matters, and there are many reasons why they end up in detention centers, said Michael Rohan, executive director of the Cook County Juvenile Detention Center. Punishment is the last resort the center uses, but peace circles aren’t necessarily going to solve a youth’s problems, Rohan said.

“Peace circles are for kids on the front end of the justice system,” Rohan said. “They are only as good as the people who facilitate them. One peace circle isn’t going to save a kid.”

The peace circles are not meant to fix problems, but rather serve as a place to tell their stories because many don’t have anyone to listen to them at home, Donovan said.

“We’re just trying to provide aid and comfort in the moment,” Donovan said. “We’re not going to solve their problems, we’re not going to solve their issues, but we’re here just to listen.”

<http://news.medill.northwestern.edu/chicago/news.aspx?id=157303>

## LISC Chicago

### Peace Circles Cool Tension, Warm Relationships

On an August afternoon at Ames Middle School, 15 students pulled their classroom chairs into a tight circle. One 8th-grader began the conversation, holding a microphone in her lap. The microphone wasn’t on—it was simply a prop, and over the next hour it was passed around the circle repeatedly, allowing only its holder to speak.

Called a “peace circle,” the activity was meant to build trust and reduce conflict by giving kids a chance to express themselves. Students and staff credit the daily ritual—which took place every afternoon at 4 p.m. throughout the summer—with transforming the climate among the 30 kids enrolled in Ames’ Elev8 summer programs.

Before the peace circle, [kids] would start yelling at each other, and a fight would break out,” said 8th-grader Karolina Skerrett.

Sometimes conflicts just simmered, said her classmate Alex Alverio. “People gave each other dirty looks.”

But having a structured way to talk through problems led to resolution rather than resentment, students said. “It helps everybody vent,” explained student Angel Cintron. “Whatever they say stays in the circle,” he explained, “so they feel safe.”

Creating social supports for middle school students is one goal of Elev8, a national demonstration project supported by The Atlantic Philanthropies that's been launched in five Chicago schools. Teaching conflict resolution has taken on a special urgency at Ames. In the past year, the school lost two of its students to gang violence.

The peace circle proved such a success during the summer that Ames is adding it to the Elev8 afterschool program this fall.

<http://www.lisc-chicago.org/Our-programs/Elev8-formerly-Integrated-Services-in-Schools/Peace-Circles-Cool-Tension-Warm-Relationships.html>

**Sponsor a Children's Sabbath Art-a-Polooza**, as did Christ United Methodist Church in 2012. Adapt their materials, below, to fit your place of worship and this year's theme.

## Children's Sabbath Pursuing Justice for Children and the Poor with Urgency and Persistence

The Children's Defense Fund, the national sponsor of Children's Sabbath, has worked for 40 years to ensure a level playing field for all children. Their emphasis is on protecting our children and giving them the tools for a successful future. This year's event focuses on how we can create a safe harbor of hope and health care for all our nation's children, including the 8 million children in America without health insurance and the poor and minority children facing risks and disadvantages that often pull them into a "Cradle to Prison Pipeline."

The United Methodist Women (UMW) also strives to foster spiritual growth, develop leaders and advocate for justice for children, youth, and women. One of their annual projects is to sponsor the Children's Sabbath activities. At Christ United Methodist Church, UMW members are joining with the Children's Ministry to highlight the needs of children within our local congregation and community and to recognize the gift of our children through an art contest. What better way to honor children than to let them show us what they need from their hearts and hands?

**Theme:** Children need \_\_\_\_\_ (Children are to complete with their own idea. Examples: A good education, access to health care, a safe environment, a healthy diet, a moral and spiritual foundation)

**Requirements:** One entry per child (no entry fee) Any medium such as crayon, colored pencil, colored chalk, water color, etc... Any method of drawing, painting, collage, etc... Submission should be no larger than 12 x 18 inches

**Submission Deadline:** All registration forms and submissions must be returned by Noon on Oct. 21st..

**Art-a-Palooza Registration Form Children's Sabbath 2012**

**Theme:** Children need \_\_\_\_\_ (Children are to complete with their own idea. Examples: A good education, access to health care, a safe environment, a healthy diet, a moral and spiritual foundation)

**Participation:** Group 1: K4 & K5 Group 2: 1st & 2nd grade Group 3: 3rd – 5th grade

**Requirements:** One entry per child (no entry fee) Any medium such as crayon, colored pencil, colored chalk, water color, etc... Any method of drawing, painting, collage, etc... Submission should be no larger than 12 x 18 inches

**Submission Deadline:** All registration forms and submissions must be returned by Noon on October 21st.

**Art Exhibition:** Saturday, October 27th @ Family Fun Day Sunday, October 28th @ Church

All entries must have child's name and age listed on back. Entries may be turned in through Sunday School class or to the Children's Ministry Desk located in the Christ Center. For more information contact Debbie Bell

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Group \_\_\_\_\_

Artwork Title:

Children need \_\_\_\_\_

Medium/Method \_\_\_\_\_

While every reasonable precaution will be taken for safeguarding the exhibit, it is distinctly understood that in no case shall Christ United Methodist Church be responsible for any loss, damage, or injury to any entry while participating in this event. Christ UMC reserves the right to photograph the artwork for use on the organizations website, Facebook or in the newsletter. I, the parent/legal guardian, agree to this statement.

X \_\_\_\_\_

### Host a Children's Sabbath Action Fair

Invite programs, agencies, and organizations that serve children and families or work for justice to set up information tables in a central location. Have them present information about their work and ways that individuals can get involved on a one-time or ongoing basis by donating, advocating, or volunteering. Include both congregational programs and community-based organizations. Possibilities include schools, Head Start programs, child care centers, community health clinics, juvenile detention facilities, youth development or mentoring programs, agencies and programs providing services to families in poverty such as a food pantry and those working to end violence in the home, school, and community, and child advocacy organizations. Encourage those staffing the tables to bring photographs or other visuals to depict their work and copies of newsletters or brochures. Urge them to be specific about volunteer and other needs.

### Conduct a Child Watch Site Visitation Program

Plan and conduct a Child Watch guided site visitation around the theme of “Turning Swords Into Plowshares” to highlight the problems of gun violence and child poverty as well as the solutions. Recommended sites include those related to gun violence and incarceration, such as the morgue, a juvenile detention facility, and/or hospital, and those that highlight healthy development and violence prevention, such as a Head Start program, schools with conflict resolution programs, and community health and mental health programs. The process of each Child Watch planning group identifying the specific sites to visit in its own community is of course a vital part of the learning that Child Watch stimulates.

### Establish or Add to a Memorial Wall

It is traditional in Judaism to commemorate the death of a relative or loved one on the walls within a temple and to stand to recite the Mourners Kaddish at the end of the service following and on the anniversary of their death. Commit to including the names of child victims of gun violence on a Memorial Wall and to stand in their memory for the Mourners Kaddish. In a larger city with more child gun deaths, commit to including the names of the city's children. In a community with fewer child gun deaths, include the names of every child killed in the state. Or, consider a public gathering around a Memorial Wall constructed—for the occasion—somewhere central in your community and public recitation of the Mourners Kaddish or another mourners prayer, perhaps timed for when gun legislation is being debated. Alternatively, some places of worship may commit to including the names of children lost to gun violence in their bulletins each week or in their monthly newsletters.

*The Lutheran magazine*

### Plow up some earth to create a memorial “Rachel's Garden.”

Spring Lutheran Church, Apollo, Pa., hosted “Rachel's Day” for the community May 1. The day of commemoration and education takes its name from Jeremiah 31:15-17 in which Rachel grieves for her children. In 1994 a woman from Bethel Lutheran on Chicago's West Side spoke out against the violence her congregation and community face. Activists transformed a vacant lot into Rachel's Garden where people, mostly mothers, come to mourn and remember children killed by gun violence. Two years later, the 1996 Women of the ELCA Triennial Convention in Minneapolis adopted Rachel's Day, the first Sunday in May, to broaden awareness of the violence children face and actions to address it.

### Plan a Community March

Partner with as many places of worship in your community as possible for a community march and vigil. Plan a group procession to various sites in the community. Some of the sites could connect to child suffering—sites where children have been shot, court houses, or gun dealerships. Other sites could be places offering children help and support, such as a Head Start program or a place of worship. At each stop, a different religious leader could offer brief, powerful information about the suffering of children from gun violence and poverty, a reading from a sacred text, and a prayer.

*The Lutheran magazine*

### “Taking it to the street”

Chanting “Stop violence, choose peace,” members of Immanuel Lutheran Church, Detroit, took their service to the streets July 29. More than a hundred people marched from the church to an open-air service with their message against gun violence in the city. They prayed at the site where a young man was killed the previous week before marching to a vacant block for worship. This was the congregation’s third anti-violence service this summer. Parishioners urged residents to speak up when they have information about crimes.

### Host a Documentary Film Series and Discussion

Plan an evening, or series of evenings, to show a documentary that will inform, inspire, and stimulate discussion and action on a topic related to children, nonviolence, and poverty. Invite members of the congregation and, if possible, invite other places of worship and members of the local community to attend. Films to consider include: *Trigger* (on gun violence), *The Birmingham Children's March* (on children’s nonviolent civil disobedience in the Civil Rights Movement), and *The Line* (on poverty). For additional video suggestions and ordering information, see the “Educational Resources” section of the Children’s Sabbath materials.

### Partner with a Child-Serving Organization

Identify an organization serving children and low-income families in your community or one nearby (if the need is greater there), and commit your place of worship to a sustained partnership through which your place of worship provides a range of assistance such as financial support, donation of goods, and professional expertise in fundraising, promotion, or management, in addition to other forms of volunteer service. Regularly publicize needs and opportunities for involvement so that many members can contribute in ways that best suit their time, gifts, and interests.

### Arrange to Have Volunteer “Pew Parents”

Volunteer “Pew Parents” sit in a designated pew with children during the worship service so that an exhausted parent or caregiver can sit on their own on occasion and use that time for renewal. If children attend your place of worship unaccompanied by adults, this can also provide them with an important sense of connection. Publicize the availability of pew parents so that visitors and new members know they are available.

### Sponsor a Parents’ Night Out

Give parents and other caregivers a chance to recharge their batteries by offering a monthly or quarterly evening when their children are cared for by responsible adults or teens in your place of worship. Publicize it to the community at large so that any stressed, short-handed parent can take advantage of the respite.

### Start a Support Group for Single Parents or Kinship Care\* Families

(\*those headed by a grandparent or other relative)

Publicize the support group to the community beyond just your congregation. Check out the helpful resources for each state at [www.grandfactsheets.org](http://www.grandfactsheets.org) and other resources available through CDF to help your place of worship support grandparents and other relatives caring for children.

### Give Youths and Others a Leg Up in the Work World

Provide internships, year-round and summer job opportunities, or job-shadowing experiences and guidance for families and youths in need. Partner with other places of worship, community organizations, and area high schools to pool the opportunities and to identify those who might benefit from them.

### Host "Families Care" Days

One of the best ways for children to learn compassion, generosity, responsibility, and other positive values is to see adults put them into practice and to do the same. One weekend a month (or quarterly), arrange an opportunity for all ages to work together to meet a need in the community. This may be preparing a meal in a community kitchen for people who are hungry, helping build a Habitat for Humanity house, cleaning up a playground, or painting over graffiti.

### Host a CDF Freedom Schools® Program

The CDF Freedom Schools program provides summer and after-school enrichment that helps low income children fall in love with reading, increases their self-esteem, and generates more positive attitudes toward learning. Children are taught using a model curriculum that supports children and families around five essential components: high quality academic enrichment; parent and family involvement; civic engagement and social action; intergenerational leadership development; and nutrition, health and mental health.

#### What Difference Does a CDF Freedom Schools Site Make?

In summer 2012, CDF Freedom Schools partners served more than 11,500 children in 83 cities and 25 states (including Washington, D.C.). CDF Freedom Schools sites work hard to ensure each child is equipped with the necessary skills to succeed in life. Our program boosts student motivation to read, and generates a more positive attitude towards learning and connects the needs of children and families to the resources of their communities. In 2012, a four-year study of children enrolled at *CDF Freedom Schools* sites in Charlotte, N.C. found over 90 percent of the children studied showed no summer learning loss, and 63 percent showed gains in reading and reading comprehension. In June 2011, the Harvard Family Research Project released a report in which the *CDF Freedom Schools* program was one of 14 innovative national programs highlighted as having "demonstrated success in providing quality learning opportunities for youth." In 2008, a three-year study conducted for the Kauffman Foundation reported that students enrolled in Kansas City, Missouri *CDF Freedom Schools* demonstrated significant improvement in reading. Learn more about the program and the application process to become a partner site at [www.freedomschools.org](http://www.freedomschools.org).

#### A Day in the Life of a CDF Freedom Schools Program Site

As children enter a *CDF Freedom Schools* program site, they are greeted and served a **nutritious breakfast or snack** by caring adults. The children and young adults move on to *Harambee!*, a time of informal sharing when children and staff come together to celebrate themselves and each other.

In the classroom where servant leader interns facilitate classes of no more than 10 students, children are engaged in reading and theme-based, hands-on activities as outlined in the **Integrated Reading Curriculum (IRC)**. Reading is a cornerstone of the program. Servant leader interns lead the children in reading excellent books throughout the summer or after school. These books feature heroes, heroines, and settings that reflect the children's cultural images and encourage them to think about how they can make a difference in their own lives. Classroom activities related to the day's reading use a variety of teaching models, including cooperative learning, role playing, group discussions, read aloud, paired reading, creative writing, and visual arts. The range of activities ensures that children with diverse experiences, talents, and levels of confidence in reading and verbal expression are actively engaged.

During the summer program as the morning draws to a close, **Drop Everything And Read (D.E.A.R.)** time is announced and shared by everyone. To emphasize the importance and joy of reading, children and adults alike "Drop Everything And Read" silently for 15 minutes, choosing from a rich selection of reading material available from the *CDF Freedom Schools* program, site library. At lunchtime the feeling of family and community spirit continues as the children join adults to eat a **nutritious meal**. After lunch, children participate in *CDF Freedom Schools* program **afternoon activities**. These are well-planned music, dance or other culturally enriching activities that are related to the themes presented in the Integrated Reading Curriculum, including field trips that expand the children's horizons. The children also may engage in social action projects and rehearse for the summer finale that is performed for parents, friends, and members of the community.

Once the day has ended for the children, *CDF Freedom Schools* program staff will meet for the daily debrief to process the day's activities, discuss the day's successes and challenges, focus on site logistics and planning, and re-energize for the next day.

*CDF Freedom Schools* sites are making a difference for children and families:

- In Newark, N.J., 81 percent of parents attended parent-teacher conferences and 96 percent brought home materials for their child to read.
- In Rochester, N.Y., the number of children physically fighting decreased by 26 percent.
- Although children in New Orleans maintain relatively high levels of depression symptoms, the number children experiencing positive mental health indicators increased. The number of children stating 'I felt like I was just as good as other children' (26.2 percent) and 'I had a good time' (5.7 percent) increased. By the end of the program, 85.7 percent of the children reported they felt happy.
- In a Washington, D.C., site that serves homeless children, fewer children reported feeling like they couldn't pay attention and 100 percent of younger children reported feeling happy (a 21.4 percent increase).

Learn more about the *CDF Freedom Schools* program at [www.childrensdefense.org/programs-campaigns/freedom-schools/participate/](http://www.childrensdefense.org/programs-campaigns/freedom-schools/participate/).

Freedom Schools Charlotte

## Reform Judaism Magazine What Works: Ideas & Initiatives

### Changing Lives in Charlotte



Shalom Park Freedom School scholars playing chess, Charlotte, North Carolina.

Picture this: 50 summer campers, mostly Hispanic and African-American elementary school children, are eating a kosher breakfast served by a Chabad Lubavitch rabbi. The campers are reading books in a Conservative temple's religious school classrooms. Jewish volunteers are leading afternoon activities. The program is being coordinated by an African-American Pentecostal preacher. And more than half of its expenses are underwritten by a Reform congregation, Temple Beth El in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Welcome to the Shalom Park Freedom School in Charlotte.

A national program of the Children's Defense Fund, Freedom Schools® offer nearly 10,000 low-income children in the U.S. intensive literacy education in a summer camp environment: two-and-a-half hours of reading and literacy in the morning, complemented by traditional camp activities in the afternoon, plus breakfast, lunch, and a healthy snack. Whereas over the summer most low-income students lose two or three months of reading ability, more than 50% of the "scholars" (as the children are called) typically gain a full year of reading comprehension at the 15 sites in Charlotte operated by a local nonprofit, Freedom School Partners.

In 2010, Rabbi Judith Schindler of Temple Beth El sought to create the first CDF Freedom School program sponsored by a Jewish community. She reached out to eight Jewish agencies in Shalom Park, a 54-acre campus home to Temple Beth El, Temple Israel (Conservative), Charlotte Jewish Day School, Levine Jewish Community Center, Jewish Family Services of Greater Charlotte, Levine-Sklut Judaic Library, the Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte, and the Foundation of Shalom Park. Everyone signed on. Coordinating logistics among eight agencies was complicated, but in the summer of 2011 the Shalom Park Freedom School opened its doors.



On a typical day, the 50 scholars eat breakfast in the Charlotte Jewish Day School cafeteria and use the school's playground, gather in the Shalom Park Foundation's assembly room, receive literacy instruction in Temple Israel's religious school classrooms, participate in the Levine-Sklut Library's story time, and carry well-stocked backpacks supplied by the Jewish Federation's Lions of Judah.

The program also resonated with the larger Charlotte Jewish community. So many volunteers signed up, an overflow of callers had to be referred to other Freedom School sites. Among the volunteers were unaffiliated Jews who connected to the Shalom Park community for the first time because of their commitment to social justice.

Last July, Children's Defense Fund President Marian Wright Edelman visited Charlotte for Jubilee, a gathering of 1,800 scholars and 600 community leaders from North and South Carolina, and witnessed the strength of the Shalom Park program firsthand. She later wrote: "I hope that many other communities will be inspired to follow this example."

Congregations interested in establishing such a program in their Jewish community are encouraged to contact Temple Beth El member Judy Seldin-Cohen: [judyseldin@yahoo.com](mailto:judyseldin@yahoo.com).

Read the article: <http://reformjudaismmag.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=2942#Bat>

### **Start or support a tutoring program in your congregation.**

Arrange to connect volunteers from the congregation with an existing tutoring program in another congregation or the community or one that your place of worship creates. If you start your own program, look for a particular need to fill. For example, are there students with learning disabilities or other special needs for whom you could provide qualified tutors? Are the tutoring needs greatest for younger children or teens in your schools? Could you set up a foreign language tutoring program to help children with French or Spanish classes, or are there many students who speak other languages that need extra help with English?

### **Start or provide volunteers for a mentoring program.**

Provide one-on-one supportive friendships for children and youths. Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America at (215) 567-7000 is a national organization that supports mentoring.

### **Provide free tax filing assistance to low-income working families.**

Before the Children's Sabbath, find out about Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites in your community or other places that are conducting outreach and enrollment efforts to help low-income families receive the benefits for which they are eligible. On the Children's Sabbath, sign up volunteers for these existing outreach projects. To find a nearby VITA site:

- Call the IRS at 1 (800) TAX-1040 or 1 (800) 849-1040.
- Visit The AARP's website (<http://www.aarp.org/money/taxaide>) or call their toll-free hotline for information: 1 (888) 227-7669.
- Visit the American Bar Association's website at <http://www.abanet.org/tax/sites.html>.
- Ahead of time, arrange for a trainer to come and train members as VITA volunteers to work at local VITA sites to assist eligible families in getting the Earned Income Tax Credits they are due.

Bridge to Benefits ([www.bridgetobenefits.org](http://www.bridgetobenefits.org)) is a multi-state project by Children's Defense Fund-Minnesota to improve the well-being of families and individuals by linking them to public work support programs and tax credits.

To see if you or someone else may be eligible for public work support programs, users click a "start" button on the website home page to use the Eligibility Screening Tool. Bridge to Benefits will ask a few simple questions but will NOT ask for information that identifies the user. It's easy, confidential, and free!

### **Partner with Other Places of Worship and Community Organizations to Combine Resources, Meet Needs, and Build Connections.**

Working through the appropriate staff and committees in your own place of worship, assess the interests, resources, needs, and partners available for a new or expanded effort to improve the lives of children:

- 1. Interest:** What is your congregation already doing to serve or advocate on behalf of children? How are their needs included and met through your place of worship? What past or current efforts have been most successful? Why do you think that is? What past or current efforts were not successful? Why do you think that is? What methods, programs, and events have been most successful in motivating and empowering members of your congregation to act on behalf of others?
- 2. Resources:** What resources are available in your congregation to meet the needs of children and families? What resources are already committed to children and social justice? What are potential resources that might be committed? In addition to financial resources, consider your physical resources—buildings, vans, playground, audiovisual, and the like. Think about your people resources. What kinds of skills, experience, contacts, time, and interests do your members have that could be contributed to an effort to help children and families?
- 3. Needs:** What are the needs of children and families in your community, state, and nation that your congregation might feel called to help meet? There are many resources to help you develop an understanding of urgent unmet needs your congregation might address. Those that touch members themselves are powerfully motivating. There are also needs that are evident through the media and others identified by community organizations. Conversation with community members is a vital way to learn what problems are pressing on others but about which your members might be unaware.
- 4. Partners:** Who in the community might become your partners in a new effort or join you to strengthen an existing effort? Concern for children is a powerful unifying force. Make the most of this opportunity to build relationships with other places of worship and with community organizations and leaders to improve the lives of children. Develop a list of effective organizations, agencies, and programs in the community that might welcome a partnership with your place of worship. Develop another list of other places of worship that might

be good partners. Each partner might bring something different to the relationship—varied interests and resources, different reach into communities that would benefit from the new services or effort, unique perspectives on the problems and what is needed. Invest time in listening to and learning from each other, and developing a shared plan in which all feel ownership.

### Launch a Justice for Children Letter-Writing Table.

Provide a weekly or monthly opportunity for congregation members to speak up for justice concerns affecting children. Make copies of the Tips on Writing Your Elected Officials and the Step-by-Step Letter on the following pages to guide participants in composing their own letters. Provide copies of the Protect Children, Not Guns Key Facts and the Truth About Guns, and the Child Poverty in America: 2011 factsheets in the Welcome section of the Children's Sabbath manual and other informational resources from [www.childrens-defense.org](http://www.childrens-defense.org). Supply the table with paper, pens, envelopes, (and even a computer if possible), and action alerts or other advocacy information from your faith group's Washington or public policy office or a children's concerns group like the Children's Defense Fund. In addition to writing or calling when legislation is coming up and their vote is important, remind members to contact legislators after the vote to congratulate them for their leadership on behalf of children or to express disappointment and urge better leadership the next time. Let them know that you are watching what they do and will hold them accountable. Review CDF's non-partisan voting record to see how your elected officials stood for children at [www.cdfactioncouncil.org](http://www.cdfactioncouncil.org). Tip: Set the table up in a location like the fellowship or social hall, library, or another gathering spot where it will be convenient to stop by. Provide informational materials and letter writing supplies that can be used right away or, if your tradition requires, taken home to be used at another time, as soon as permissible.

## Tips on Writing Letters to Your Elected Officials and Members of Congress

- **Be brief.** Address only one issue. A letter need not be longer than four or five sentences.
- **Be specific.** If you are writing about specific legislation, include its bill number or title.
- **Write your own letter,** adapting a sample letter as appropriate. Form letters do not receive the same attention as individually written letters.
- **Be positive and constructive.** Try to say something complimentary in the first paragraph. It is just as important to thank members of Congress for voting the right way as to criticize them for voting the wrong way.
- **Say in your own words** why the legislation matters to you and to children. Clearly state your reason for supporting or opposing the bill or issue you are writing about.
- **If you have a personal story about children in poverty, without health coverage, or in the pipeline to prison, consider sharing it.** These personal stories are the most effective way for your legislator to truly understand the issue and the impact it has on real lives.
- **If you have particular knowledge or expertise, describe it.** Relating the bill to local or state conditions is especially effective.
- **If you wish, feel free to include a copy of a report, a newsletter story, or a local survey to support your arguments.** Don't presume that the legislator is aware of such information, even if you think it is common knowledge.
- **Be sure to sign your name legibly and include your address and telephone number** so your representative or senator can respond.
- **If possible, fax the letter** (since postal mail may be delayed by screening procedures) or **send the letter electronically.** Your legislator will likely have a link on his or her website directing constituents to "contact us." To find the contact information for your legislator, visit [www.congressmerge.com](http://www.congressmerge.com).

## Step-by-Step Sample Letter

(Please note: The examples written in the parentheses are meant as examples only. Please feel free to write your letter in your own words to reflect your concerns, experience, and perspective.)

The Honorable \_\_\_\_\_  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Or:

The Honorable \_\_\_\_\_  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator \_\_\_\_\_: or Dear Representative \_\_\_\_\_:

**1. Introduce yourself.** (My name is *Janet Doe* and I am a member of *Mytown Congregation* in *Mytown*. I appreciate your commitment to public service and desire to do the right thing.)

**2. Share your concern for children.** (Today, one child or teen will be shot by a gun every 30 minutes and a child will die every 3 hours and 15 minutes. I am writing out of concern for the safety of our children. Too many American families have been destroyed by gun violence.)

**3. Share your vision for children.** (Every child's life is sacred and it is long past time that we pass common sense gun safety regulations to protect all our children.)

**4. Talk about the solutions and urge action on them.** [*Visit the Children's Sabbath Action Page at [www.childrendefense.org/childrenssabbaths](http://www.childrendefense.org/childrenssabbaths) after October 1 for the latest information on legislation and needed action and an updated sample letter.*]

**5. Thank the Member of Congress and ask for a reply.** (Thank you and I look forward to hearing back from you about this urgent issue.)

Sincerely,

*Your name*

*Your address*

*Your telephone number*

### How to address your envelope:

The Honorable \_\_\_\_\_  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Or:

The Honorable \_\_\_\_\_  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

## Tips on Writing a Letter to the Editor

*(Adapted from Reclaiming Our Democracy: Healing the Break Between People and Government, by Sam Daley-Harris)*

- 1. Respond to a recent news story or editorial.** A good letter might begin, "Your article, 'Toddler Caught in Crossfire Dies,' on the recent shooting in our city was heartbreaking but not surprising. A child or teen is killed or injured by a gun every 30 minutes in our nation."
- 2. Make your letter short.** Check your local paper for submission criteria; a letter should contain 100-200 words. Provide a few striking facts that might surprise an editor or a reader: "The number of children under 5 killed by guns in 2010 was more than the number of law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty that same year." The Children's Defense Fund's website, [www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org), is a good source of information.
- 3. Use descriptive words that communicate your passion about the issue.** Don't be dry. ("Imagine walking into a classroom of 20 hopeful, eager students. In just three days, more children and teens will be killed by guns than all the children in that classroom.")
- 4. Offer a solution to the problem:** "Congress must work together to pass gun safety legislation that protects children, not guns...."
- 5. Review:** Re-read your letter and check for any spelling or grammatical mistakes before you submit it. Include your address, day, and evening phone numbers; editors often verify the identity of the writer before they print the letter.

## Gun Violence

### Sample Letter to the Editor:

*Look for articles in your local paper about the violence of guns and poverty—then reference that article at the top of your letter to the Editor.*

Dear Editor:

In response to the recent article, *insert title of article and date*, about the tragic death of *insert child's name* by gun violence, we mourn with the family for their terrible loss and we mourn that we as a community have not stood up to stop the epidemic of gun violence that kills or injures a child or teen every thirty minutes. It is up to us to stop these preventable tragedies that rip families apart, and like the massacre in Newtown, Connecticut frighten our children and make them afraid to walk the street or go to school. We need to make our homes and streets and schools safe for our children. It's long past time to pass common sense gun safety laws and protect children, not guns.

## Poverty

### Sample Letter to the Editor:

*Look for articles in your local paper about budget cuts, unemployment, hunger and homelessness—then reference that article at the top of your letter to the Editor.*

Dear Editor:

In response to the recent article, *insert title of article and date*, about proposed budget cuts to \_\_\_\_\_ it is important to remember that children and families have been already been battered by a deep recession and slow recovery. A series of budget cuts from the national, state and local level has created more hardship for families struggling to stay afloat.

With 16.1 million poor children in America, too many of us don't understand the long-term budget implications of cutting programs that move at-risk children to productive lives. For instance, did you know that eliminating early education investments now increases the chance a boy will go to prison later by 39 percent? Paying for that prison will cost us nearly three times more each year than it would have cost to provide him with a quality early learning experience. Investments in children do matter. It's a simple calculation, really. Protect now or pay later.

## Meeting with Your Legislators

### Before Your Visit

**Begin planning for your visit.** Don't worry if you have butterflies in your stomach at the thought of meeting with your legislator for the first time. It would be unusual if you didn't. Know that the best way to communicate with your legislator is to make a personal visit. You probably will enjoy the experience—and the legislator will appreciate the time you spent communicating your views. So, take a deep breath and begin planning! First, decide on the issues you want to discuss.

**Make an appointment.** When making an appointment, explain what issue you would like to discuss. If the legislator is unavailable, the aide who deals with your issue often will be knowledgeable and influential in helping to form the lawmaker's views. Don't feel slighted if you end up meeting with the aide. He or she can be very influential and, if your meeting goes well, may also encourage your legislator to meet with you in person the next time.

**Do your homework.** Study the legislator's voting record on a number of issues, using CDF's nonpartisan Congressional Voting Record and other sources, so you can comment on something positive, if possible, and know if the particular issue is one on which the legislator tends to agree or disagree with you. If there is a bill that interests you, know its status and whether your legislator has taken a position on it.

**Remember the experts!** Parents, grandparents, service providers, educators, religious and business leaders, police officers, doctors and nurses, and others who witness children's needs on a daily basis are children's best advocates. They really are the experts when it comes to how bills and policies will affect children, and it's important that policy makers have a wide variety of people to call upon when they have questions about their work's impact on children. Children's advocacy groups often seek out these everyday experts to present the most compelling information during legislative visits. Talk about personal experiences you have had, if possible, to illustrate your point.

**Be prepared.** Before meeting with the legislator or aide, plan and organize your presentation, and practice what you are going to say. If you are going with other people to the meeting, get together beforehand to make sure that you all have the same purpose. Take along helpful information to back up your arguments: newspaper articles about the problems children face, statistics, or a fact sheet. (CDF can provide some of the information you need. Visit CDF's website at [www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org).)

### During Your Visit

**Make your message concise.** You may think your meeting is for 30 minutes and then arrive to find the legislator's schedule so tight that you get only five minutes. Know exactly what you want to say and be prepared to say it quickly, if circumstances demand that.

**Present solutions.** People often feel overwhelmed by problems they consider too massive and diverse for corrective action, so don't just talk about the problem. Share one or two concrete ideas for ways to improve the lives of children in your community. Tell your legislator what it will take to ensure that no child is left behind.



**Talk about what works.** Using success stories of real children and families who are being helped by Head Start, child care, job training, or health insurance will strengthen your argument and counter claims that all government programs are ineffective.

**Search for common ground.** Don't be exclusive or judgmental. Keeping in mind the wide range of viewpoints in Congress and in every community and state legislature, frame your messages carefully to include words and themes that will reach new audiences and persuade them to become new allies. Children's advocates care as much as anyone about efficiency, accountability, fiscal responsibility, and personal responsibility. Use themes like these to frame your message.

**Be honest.** It's fine to say you don't know the answer to a question and to promise to provide information later, by phone, fax, or e-mail. This also gives you another opportunity to contact the office.

### Following Your Visit

**Build a relationship.** The better your communication, the more seriously you will be taken, and the more willing the representative and his or her staff will be to rely upon you and your judgments.

**Follow up your visit with a letter thanking the legislator for the time spent listening to your concerns.** Enclose any documentation you had agreed to provide to bolster your position, and briefly restate your views.

**Provide additional information.** Send articles, write letters with further information, or offer assistance in thinking through solutions that could work in your community.

**Call periodically with updates.**

**Invite them to speak.** Invite the representative or the staff person who handles children's issues to speak before your congregation or a community group in which you are involved.

**Invite them to a site visit.** Invite the legislator to visit a successful child-serving program with which you work, such as an after-school program, conflict resolution program, or Head Start class.

**Show broad support for your concerns.** If your legislator or aide disagrees or is noncommittal, don't threaten or argue after you have made your case, because it is counter-productive. A better strategy is to plan another visit with others to show more community support for your position, to put together a bunch of letters from constituents, or to think of another tactic such as a letter to the editor. Persistence often pays.

**Watch how your legislator votes and respond.** If the legislator votes with your position on the issue, recognize that vote with a written "thank you." Such recognition may influence his or her next vote on children's issues. It also lets your legislator know that you are watching closely. If the legislator votes against your position, write or call to express your disappointment, and urge reconsideration of the issue the next time it comes up for a vote.