

WELCOME TO THE 2025 NATIONAL OBSERVANCE OF
CHILDREN'S SABBATHS® CELEBRATION

Centering Children's Voices

Tools for Children's Sabbath Planning &
Reflection

Introduction

Children's Sabbaths places children at the center. In this section, you'll find their words, prayers, and reflections — voices that carry wisdom, utter joy, and truth.

These voices extend are an invitation because when children speak, they remind us of possibility, honesty, and wonder. Listening deeply to children is an act of discipleship and justice work. It resists the all too common silencing of young voices and challenges us to reimagine the world through their eyes.

Children's Sabbaths We also beckons welcome the voices of our own inner child — the tender, curious, playful parts of ourselves that still long to be heard. Honoring children means honoring the child within us, remembering the truths we once knew before the world tried to quiet them. On Children's Sabbaths weekend, we let both speak: the children in our midst, and the child within, together calling us into joy, freedom, and *Beloved Community*.



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Centering Children's Voices

How To Use This Section

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- Begin planning by centering children's contributions — their stories, art, and ideas — as the seeds of the program.
- Incorporate children's quotes into bulletins, slides, worship services, and sermons.
- Use prompts to invite children in your own community to share reflections in worship, Sunday school, or intergenerational gatherings.
- Share children's artwork, prayers, or poems alongside their voices. Display them in gathering spaces or fellowship halls.
- Play recordings or videos of children's voices during worship or small group time.
- Host a listening session (see below) to hear directly from children and families.
- Begin planning by centering children's contributions — their stories, art, and ideas — as the seeds of the program.
- Encourage adults to reflect on what they hear from children: What challenges do their words raise? What joys do they reveal? What action does their truth call us to take?
- Carry children's voices beyond your Children's Sabbath by weaving them into ongoing worship services, education, advocacy, and community life.

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Trauma-Informed Care

Mandated Reporting

A Note on Mandated Reporting

All adults working with children must remain mindful of their role as mandated reporters. If a child discloses abuse, neglect, or harm, you are legally and morally required to report it to the proper authorities in your state. Trauma-informed care does not replace these obligations — it strengthens them by ensuring responses are compassionate, immediate, and protective of the child's safety.



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Trauma-Informed Care

Trauma-Informed Care Values Self-Assessment

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Purpose of this Tool

The following values underlie all the elements of trauma-informed care. These values guide the relationships between organizers and participants, organizers and peers, and supervisory organizers and their team members. Inherent in these values is the belief that involvement and input should shape all aspects of an organization's functions. Use the scale provided to reflect on how much each value is embraced by your community (1=Not at all, 2=Slightly, 3=Moderately, 4=Mostly, 5=Very Much).

This tool is designed for planning teams to use before and after your Children's Sabbath, so you can measure how well your practices align with trauma-informed values and track growth over time.

How to Use This Assessment

1. Invite organizers, volunteers, faith leaders, and—if possible—youth to complete this tool together.
2. Review the description aloud so everyone understands what it means.
3. Circle, fill-in, or check 1–5 to show how well your community lives out that value. (1 = Not at all, 5 = Very much).
4. Write down real examples of where this value shows up—or where it's missing.
5. Identify which values are strongest, which need attention, and note 1–2 next steps.
6. Complete again after Children's Sabbath to track growth.

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Trauma-Informed Care

Why Trauma-Informed Assessment Matters for
Children's Sabbaths

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Children's Sabbaths is not just an annual event—it is a spiritual, communal practice of centering children's voices, needs, and hopes. To do this faithfully, organizers must ensure that the spaces they create are truly safe, healing, and empowering. This is why trauma-informed reflection is a necessary part of the planning process.

This assessment matters because:

- **Children carry stories and struggles with them.** Some have lived through poverty, racism, bullying, loss, or other trauma. A worship or community space that ignores this may unintentionally cause harm.
- **Congregations need awareness.** Many communities assume they are safe but have never paused to ask, *Do children feel seen, safe, and valued here?* The assessment brings these questions to the surface.
- **It shifts planning.** The results can directly inform choices about how to set up worship, what activities to include, how to invite participation, and how to care for children if difficult feelings emerge.
- **It strengthens intergenerational trust.** When children see adults taking safety, trust, and empowerment seriously, they are more likely to share openly and participate joyfully.
- **It models accountability.** By reflecting on their own practices, organizers show that adults are also learners and that building *Beloved Community* requires honesty and growth.
- **It aligns with faith values.** A trauma-informed approach is another way of living into love and justice—core values of Children's Defense Fund and the vision of *Beloved Community*.

This assessment ensures that your Children's Sabbath is not only inspirational but also responsibly designed. It helps leaders embody love in action by creating spaces where children's flourishing is possible.

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Trauma-Informed Care

Assessment

Trauma-Informed Care Values Self-Assessment

Examples

- Value: Collaboration
- Rating: 2
- Notes: *Leadership decisions are usually made by adults; children are rarely asked to contribute.*
- Next Step: Invite children and youth to plan one portion of worship during Children's Sabbath.

Value	Rating (1-5)
Safety <i>Physical and emotional safety.</i>	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Trustworthiness <i>Creating trust through safety and boundaries.</i>	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Peer Support <i>Guiding self-determined growth.</i>	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Collaboration <i>Sharing decision-making and input.</i>	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Empowerment <i>Building strength, choice, and control.</i>	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Cultural Sensitivity <i>Respecting and integrating cultures.</i>	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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Trauma-Informed Self-Check-In

Trauma-Informed Self-Check-In Questions

Trauma-informed self-check-in questions are reflective prompts designed to help organizers, leaders, and participants pause and assess the emotional, relational, and spiritual safety of a space. They are rooted in social work and trauma theory, which teach us that healing environments are not assumed—they must be cultivated with care.

These questions are about awareness, not judgment. They invite communities to look honestly at whether the values of safety, trust, inclusion, and dignity are being embodied in real time.

Why Are They Needed for Children's Sabbaths?

- **Creates accountability:** A Children's Sabbath is meant to be a sacred, healing experience. Without intentional check-ins, communities may unintentionally overlook the needs of children and families.
- **Centers lived experience:** These questions invite organizers to think beyond logistics and ask, *How are children and families actually experiencing this space?*
- **Prevents harm:** By regularly asking whether people feel safe, valued, and heard, leaders can identify and address harmful dynamics before they grow.
- **Strengthens trust:** When communities normalize self-check-in, they demonstrate humility and care, showing children and families that their well-being is the top priority.
- **Guides practice:** The answers to these questions can shape adjustments in worship, activities, or facilitation to better honor trauma-informed values.

Example in Practice

- Before a planning meeting: *"Does anyone feel left out of the decision-making?"*
- During Children's Sabbath: *"Are children's voices being heard and honored right now?"*
- Afterward: *"Do we feel we created a space where identities were respected and all felt valued?"*

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Trauma-Informed Self-Check-In

Activity

Before Planning Meeting

- ☐ Did everyone have a chance to share?
- ☐ Does anyone feel left out of the decision-making process?

During Children's Sabbath

- ☐ Are children's voices being heard and honored right now?
- ☐ Does the space feel emotionally and physically safe?

After Children's Sabbath

- ☐ Did children feel respected, heard, and valued?
- ☐ What practices should we carry forward into future gatherings?
- ☐ Do we feel we created a space where identities were respected and all felt valued?

Notes and Reflections

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Inner Child Work

Healing Ourselves to Better Hear Children

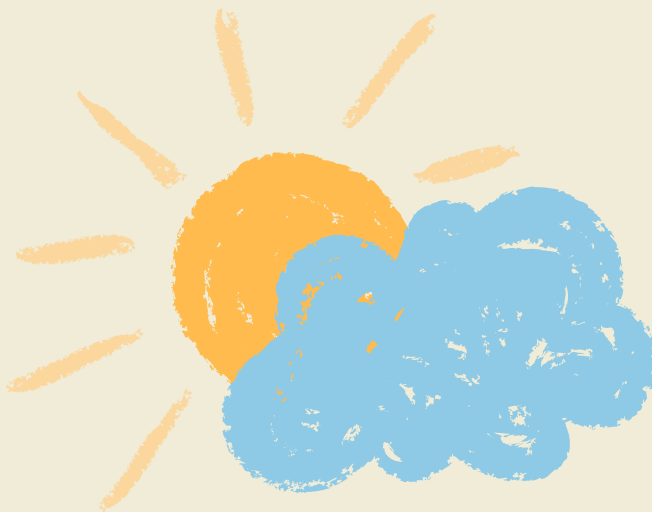
Welcoming the voices of children also invites us to welcome the voice of the inner child within ourselves. Inner child work is a therapeutic and spiritual practice that helps adults reconnect with the parts of themselves that are playful, vulnerable, wounded, or full of wonder. When adults engage in inner child work, they can listen to children with more empathy, patience, and authenticity.

Why this matters:

- Social work and psychology highlight that unhealed childhood wounds can shape adult behavior and relationships (Miller, 1997; Bradshaw, 1990).
- Engaging the inner child helps adults resist silencing children, because they can recall what it felt like to be silenced.
- Faith communities that embrace inner child work invite all people into healing and liberation.

Practices:

- Journaling, art, or storytelling about childhood joys and struggles.
- Prayer or meditation with the inner child.
- Play—coloring, singing, dancing—as acts of healing.
- Sharing reflections in intergenerational groups.



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Inner Child Work

Activity

To reconnect with your own childhood experiences so you can approach children with empathy instead of dismissal. Healing your own inner child helps you listen better to the children in your care.

Who this is activity for: Organizers, adults, and leaders.

Activity: Draw Your Inner Child

1. On the blank page, draw yourself as a child. This can be a stick figure, doodle, or symbol — it doesn't need to be artistic.
2. Around the drawing, write words that describe what your inner child felt (e.g., playful, shy, wounded, curious).
3. Add what your inner child needs today (e.g., love, patience, affirmation).

Facilitator Help:

- Normalize all types of drawing.
- Close with a grounding practice (deep breath, prayer, or blessing).
- Invite sharing only if participants feel comfortable.



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Consent, Permissions, and Safeguarding

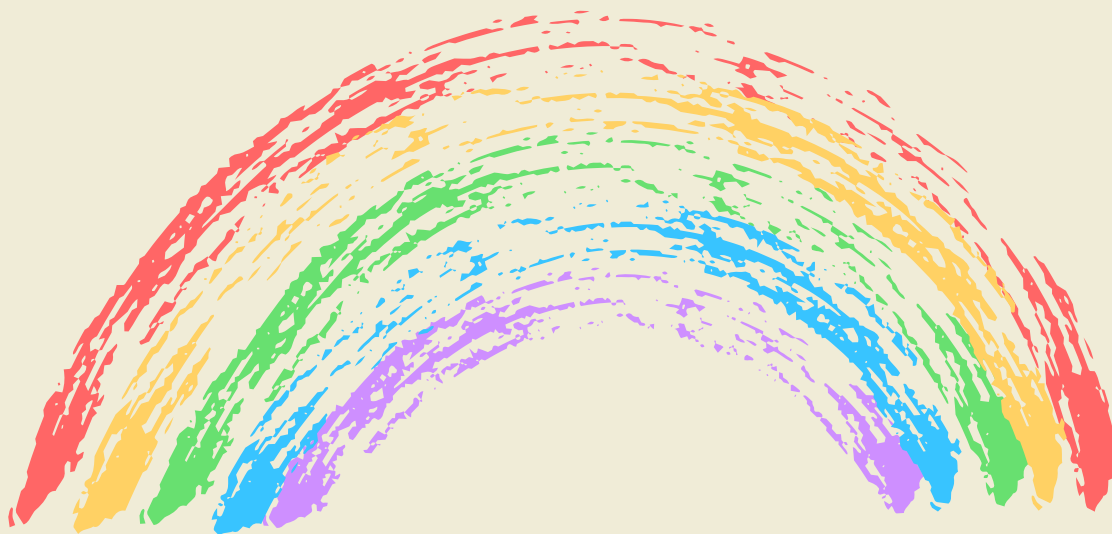
When inviting children to share their voices in any form—art, writing, video, audio, or live testimony—, it is essential to obtain consent from parents, guardians, or caregivers, and assent from the children themselves. This ensures respect, safety, and legal protection for all involved.

Best Practices:

- Use written consent forms explaining how contributions may be used.
- Always seek child assent with age-appropriate explanations.
- Clarify that participation is voluntary and consent can be withdrawn.
- Protect privacy by avoiding identifying details without explicit permission.
- Follow local safeguarding laws and policies.

Language Notes:

- Use parent, guardian, or caregiver to acknowledge diverse family structures.
- Refer to participation as a choice.
- Use “assent” for children and “consent” for adults.



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Consent, Permissions, and Safeguarding Activity

Children's voices are sacred. To honor them, we must protect their dignity and safety in every setting. Safeguarding is a covenant of care that ensures participation is voluntary, respectful, and legally sound. By practicing consent and assent, we show children that their bodies, words, and choices matter. Safeguarding also builds trust with families and models accountability for the whole community.

Who it's for: Organizers / clergy / volunteers

Activity: Safeguarding Checklist

1. Review the checklist together as a team.
2. Check items already in place; circle what still needs work.
3. Assign someone responsible for each action.

Facilitator Help:

- Use this tool before any child's voice is shared (art, video, testimony).
- Include mandated reporter training.
- Clarify roles: who collects forms, who ensures privacy, who tracks laws.

Safeguarding Checklist

- ☐ *Consent Forms: Written consent from parents/guardians/caregivers has been collected.*
- ☐ *Child Assent: Children were given age-appropriate explanations and agreed to participate.*
- ☐ *Voluntary Participation: It is clear that children may decline or withdraw at any time.*
- ☐ *Privacy Protection: Identifying details (names, faces, locations) will not be shared without explicit permission.*
- ☐ *Safeguarding Policies: We are following all local safeguarding laws and organizational policies.*
- ☐ *Mandated Reporting: All adults involved understand and agree to follow mandated reporting laws if a child discloses abuse or neglect.*
- ☐ *Safe Adults Present: Two or more trusted adults are always present during children's participation.*
- ☐ *Documentation: Consent and safeguarding forms are stored securely and reviewed regularly.*

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Pathways to Centering Children's Voices

In Worship

- Incorporate children's quotes into liturgy.
- Invite children to offer prayers or reflections.
- Share recordings or videos.

In Education

- Use prompts in classes.
- Display art and writings.
- Invite children to co-lead.

In Community Life

- Plan your Children's Sabbath with children's input.
- Host intergenerational reflections.
- Form a children's advisory group.

Reflection Prompts

- Who is God?
- What makes you laugh?
- What does joy taste like?
- What if you could be the leader of everything?



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Pathways to Centering Children's Voices

Activity

Children's wisdom belongs in every space: worship, education, and community life. Too often, they are spectators rather than participants. This activity helps communities assess current practices, commit to new ones, and hear directly from children through reflection prompts.

Who it's for: Organizers + children

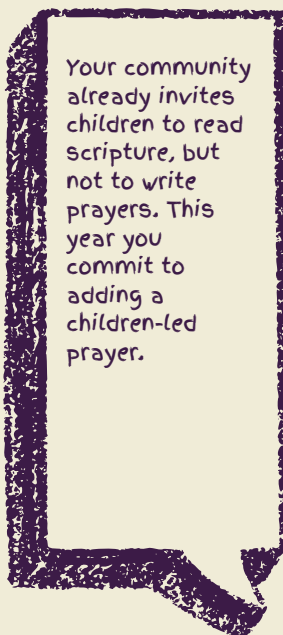
Activity: Voices in Every Space

1. Read through the Worship, Education, and Community columns.
2. Check the practices you already use.
3. Choose one new practice in each column to commit to this year.

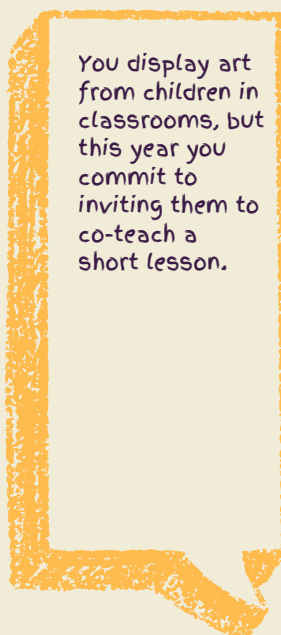
Facilitator Help:

- Invite children or youth leaders to join you in filling out the page.
- Use the reflection prompts with children and record their answers in the workbook.
- Follow up on commitments in leadership meetings — don't let them fade.

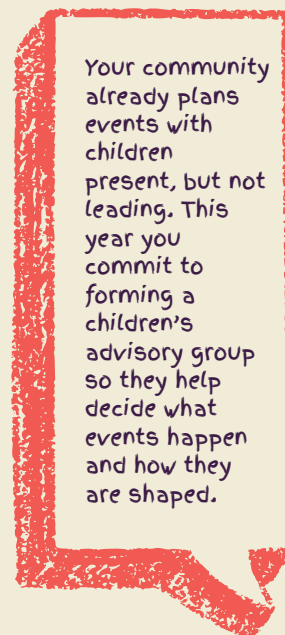
Worship



Education



Community



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Activities to Lift Children's Voices

Activity

The World Through Your Eyes

Invite children to imagine a just and joyful world. Provide paper, markers, or clay, and ask, "If you could design the world in one way, what would you change?" Encourage expression through drawing, painting, or building. Display their creations during worship or post them on a "Children's Sabbath Vision Wall."

Joy Collage

Help children explore what joy looks, feels, and tastes like. Provide magazines, scissors, glue, and poster board. Ask, "What brings you joy?" Children can cut or draw images, then assemble a collage. Display these as an art gallery or share them digitally in a worship slideshow.

Prayer Wall

Encourage children to share prayers and gratitude. Post large sheets of paper or set up a board. Provide sticky notes or index cards where children can write or draw prayers. Incorporate some into worship prayers and invite adults to add prayers alongside children's.

Story Circle

Honor oral traditions and storytelling. Gather children in a circle. Invite each to share a memory, story, or hope while adults listen with reverence. Record or write down stories and reflect them back to the community, making children's voices a visible part of communal memory.

Listening Walk

Teach mindfulness and attention to God's creation. Walk outside with children and invite them to notice sounds, smells, and sights. Gather afterwards to reflect: "What did you hear, see, or feel?" Create a group poem, litany, or prayer from what was noticed.

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Activities to Lift Children's Voices

Activity

Children often express themselves best through art, play, and imagination. These activities let them share their voices in ways that are creative, joyful, and healing. Each one can be displayed or shared in worship to show children that their gifts are valued.

Who it's for: Children (guided by adults)

Activity: Joy Collage

1. Give magazines, scissors, and glue.
2. Ask: "What brings you joy?"
3. Create a collage and host a gallery walk.

Facilitator Help:

- Let children lead.
- Emphasize that there are no "wrong" answers or drawings.
- Always affirm children's contributions and display/share their work respectfully.



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Hosting a Listening Session with Children

Activity

Curating listening sessions requires a womanist trauma-informed approach: creating sacred, culturally humble, and empathic spaces where children's voices are welcomed and celebrated.

Who it's for: Organizers + Children

Activity: Key Steps Listening Guide

1. Greet: Welcome children by name and invite them to honor their families and ancestors.
2. Ground: Begin with breath, music, or movement to help children feel centered.
3. Ask: Use open-ended questions that encourage creativity and honesty.
4. Create: Provide art supplies or other creative materials for expression beyond words.
5. Respect: Honor boundaries, validate all feelings, and affirm children's choices.
6. Close: End with gratitude, celebration, and joy—through clapping, singing, or dancing together.

Facilitator Help:

- Take notes in real time or appoint a recorder.
- Always close with joy so children leave feeling uplifted.
- Share back with the community: "This is what we heard, and here's how we'll respond."

Example

During a listening session, children are asked: "What makes you feel safe?"

One child says, "When my teacher listens."

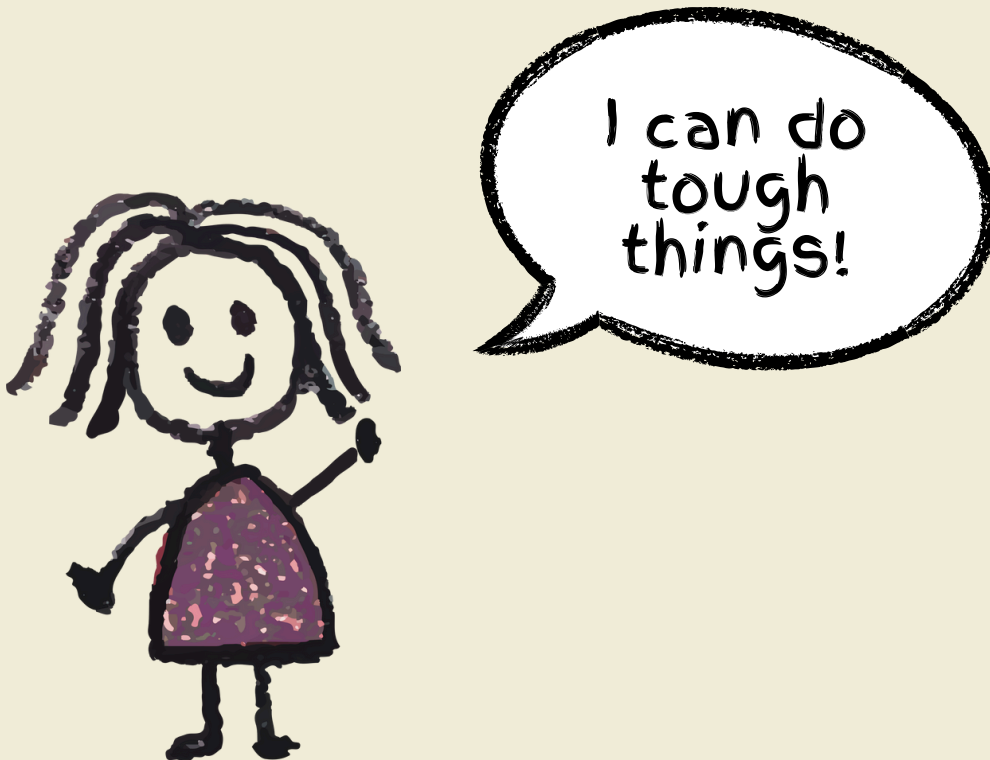
The group writes this down and later commits to listening circles in classrooms.

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Carrying Voices Forward

Your Children's Sabbath is only the beginning.
Communities are called to carry children's voices into
every season of life together.

- Document children's words and art, creating archives of wisdom to revisit regularly.
- Share insights in adult study, worship planning, and leadership meetings so children's truths shape decisions.
- Create ongoing structures—such as children's advisory groups—to keep their voices present in ministry.
- Act on what is heard: let children's hopes and concerns inspire advocacy, worship, and justice work.



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Carrying Voices Forward

Activity

Children's Sabbath is only the beginning. Carrying voices forward ensures children's contributions shape worship, advocacy, and community life throughout the year. This models accountability.

Who it's for: Organizers/leaders

Activity: Our Commitments

1. Write one concrete action for Worship, one for Advocacy, and one for Community Life.
2. Assign a person or team responsible for each.
3. Set a date to revisit progress.

Facilitator Help:

- Post commitments publicly (bulletin board, newsletter).
- Revisit them quarterly.
- Involve children in tracking progress.



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Affirmations, Poems, and Creative Writing

Integrating affirmations, poems, and creative writing into your Children's Sabbath allows children and adults to practice positive self-talk, create shared cultural anchors, and nurture future freedom songs. These practices affirm dignity, joy, and belonging while connecting generations in worship.

Affirmations and Positive Self-Talk for Children

Affirmations are short, powerful statements that children can repeat to themselves to nurture confidence, resilience, and a positive sense of identity. Social work and psychology recognize affirmations as a practice of cognitive reframing—replacing negative self-talk with words that affirm dignity, strength, and possibility. In faith and community contexts, affirmations remind children that they are beloved, capable, and worthy of love and care. They are a daily spiritual and emotional practice of speaking truth into one's life.

- *I am important.*
- *I can do tough things.*
- *Tears mean that I need to be watered.*
- *I am a precious gift to the world.*
- *I will be kind to myself.*
- *I am the future.*
- *I can always start over again.*
- *My heart is colorful.*
- *My community loves me.*
- *The water helps me grow.*
- *Sometimes I cry and that's okay.*
- *I say nice words to myself.*
- *It is okay to ask for help.*
- *I have big dreams and I can achieve them.*
- *I am proud of myself.*
- *I like myself.*
- *I love myself.*

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Affirmations, Poems, and Creative Writing Activity

Words shape how we see ourselves and what we believe is possible. Affirmations and creative writing help children replace negative self-talk with dignity and hope, while poems and prayers give them language to dream of freedom.

Who it's for: Children & intergenerational groups

Activity: My Affirmations

1. Read sample affirmations aloud (e.g., "I am important. I am loved. My heart is colorful.").
2. Choose one that speaks to you, or write your own.
3. Decorate your affirmation with colors or stickers.

Facilitator Help:

- Affirm every child's (or participants) words.
- Create a collective "affirmation wall" or poem.
- Remind children (or participants): *"Your words matter."*

