



Soul Matters

Cultivating Compassion



Youth Group
October 2025

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Welcome to Cultivating Compassion

Cultivating Compassion is a theme rich with possibility for service, justice, and charity projects, which we have provided in this packet. But if we look beyond simply taking

kind actions, compassion is a complicated process of human relating that is particularly appropriate for adolescents. Compassion involves recognizing what is happening for others, so seeing beyond one's own singular egocentric viewpoint. Then it involves trying to understand others, so we have a need to practice good communication and listening skills. Next comes empathy, or feeling for and with others, which is a chance to develop emotional intelligence. And finally compassion requires action to try to help others, which can provide youth with opportunities to practice agency and empowerment in the world.

Compassion can also be applied to the self, and self-compassion can help teens be more resilient and encourage a growth mindset that keeps trying to learn. With this model cultivating compassion is also a way to cultivate skills of relationship and resiliency for our youth. In this vein I've picked activities for this month that give opportunities to stretch a bit around communication and care.

I hope you find this journey of compassion to be heart-filled and loving, as well as just challenging enough to promote good growth.

In faith,

Sara Lewis

[Youth Ministry Resources Lead](#)

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Notes About Using the Packet

Justice Projects

This month we have [two justice projects](#) which will both require a bit more advanced planning and organizing if you want to implement them. The care packages project can be relatively simple, but the bake sale fundraiser project will require more coordination. These more complicated projects are wonderful opportunities to promote youth leadership development, so please consider bringing youth into the planning process and sharing leadership with them.

Materials Needed

We are providing a [complete list of materials needed](#) in each packet, as though you were going to do every possible activity. If you have the capacity to gather all the materials at the beginning of the month, this will allow you to be more flexible and spontaneous about which activities youth actually do in any given session. Not enough youth or not enough interest for a planned activity this week? Just switch to another option!

Flexible New Structure

This new year we've introduced a new format for the youth packets, with flexible components and suggested session outlines. Thank you to everyone who provided feedback or suggestions on last month's packet. We love to hear feedback about this new approach and how it is working for you.

We aim to support the variety of ways youth ministry is being done in our congregations, in all of its variety. I'd be happy to answer questions or help with any challenges that this new format may contain. You can reach me directly at revsaralewis@gmail.com

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Materials Needed this Month

We suggest having all materials on hand for the whole month, allowing you the greatest flexibility in switching activities as needed. That may not always be feasible, but you could still aim for a good variety of options ready to go at any time. The activities to which the supplies are needed are identified after the supply in parenthesis.

Basic Supplies

- Chalice and candle
- Name tags and markers
- Equipment to show videos and play music
- Hymnals
- Newsprint pad, easel, markers, masking tape

Special Supplies

- Statue or image of [Kuan Yin](#) ([moon night meditation](#))

- Dark construction paper for each participant, a large variety of natural objects such as leaves, grass, dried wheat, flowers, pinecones, acorns, rocks, feathers, and sticks ([nature mandala](#)) • Copies of the written pieces you plan to read aloud, enough for all participants
 - [Dorothea Dix | Windows and Mirrors | Faith Curriculum Library, Tapestry of Faith | UUA.org](#) • [Clara Barton | Resistance and Transformation | Faith Curriculum Library, Tapestry of Faith | UUA.org](#)
 - [Unitarians worked to 'save' Ute Indians | UU World Magazine](#)
- Devices that have emojis (tablets or smart phones) OR a [collection of emojis printed](#) out (use this option if anyone in your group doesn't own a device) ([emoji puzzle](#))
- A large posterboard heart, cut up into puzzle pieces (you'll need to prep this ahead of time) ([heart puzzle](#))
- Ziplock bags (gallon and sandwich size), paper, pens. You might also provide packing materials if your group is small or likely to forget to bring anything. Suggested packings: non-perishable snacks, disposable water, juice, or electrolyte bottles, clean new socks, warm items like hats, gloves, and scarves, and hygiene supplies. ([Care packages](#))

Art Supplies

- Felt, buttons, eyes, pipe cleaners, fabric markers or sharpies, scissors, hot glue guns and/or sewing needles and thread, stuffing ([compassion critters](#))
- Small empty boxes (such as matchboxes, [Altoid tins](#), or small gift boxes) for each youth, variety of papers, scissors, markers, glue. Optional extra materials could be: glitter, stickers, small charms, small shaped erasers, sequins or rhinestones, etc. ([comfort boxes](#))
- Paper, crayons, black sharpie markers, scotch tape, electric tea lights, small votive glass jars ([luminaries](#))
- Blank notecards and envelopes, markers ([care cards](#))

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Suggested Session Outlines

One Session a Month Outline (120 minutes)

[Opening words](#) of your choice (5 minutes)

[Check in prompt](#) of your choice (15 minutes)

Art: [Care Cards](#) (10 minutes)

Media: [Hard Choices Our Previous Selves Had to Make](#) (10 minutes) **or** [Grandma's Hands](#) (10 minutes)
or [What Love Is](#) (12 minutes)

[Sharing Our Thoughts and Stories](#) (15 minutes)

Hymn: [Filled With Loving Kindness](#) (10 minutes)

UU Connection: [Clara Barton](#) (20 minutes)

Spiritual Practice: [Loving Kindness Meditation](#) (10 minutes)

Justice: [Care Packages](#) (10 minutes)

Game: [Hard Conversations](#) (10 minutes)

[Closing Words](#) of your choice (5 minutes)

Two Sessions a Month Outline (90 minutes per session)

Includes a special monthly event (movie event, social justice/service effort, etc.)

<p>Session One: Compassion and Mixed Emotions Opening words (5 m) Check ins (10 m) Media: Compassion is Natural (10m) or Hard Choices (10m) Hymn: Filled With Loving Kindness (10m) UU Connection: Clara Barton (20m) Game: Hard Conversations (10m) Bake Sale Planning (10m) Spiritual Practice: Loving Kindness (10 m) Closing Words (5m)</p>	<p>Session Two: Compassion as Action Opening words (5 m) Check ins (10 m) Game: Cooperative Puzzle (10m) Art: Care Cards AND Sharing Our Thoughts and Stories (10m) Hymn: There is a Love (10m) UU Connection: Dorothea Dix (20m) Bake Sale Planning (10m) Justice: Care Packages (10 m) Closing Words (5m)</p>
<p align="center">Special Group Activity Bake Sale</p>	

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Four Sessions a Month Outline

<p>Week One: Self Compassion (90 min) Opening words (5m) Check ins (10m) Hymn: There is a Love (10m) Game: Cooperative Puzzle (10m) Practice: Moon Meditation (10m) Art: Compassion Critters (10m) Sharing Our Thoughts and Stories (10m) Media: Hard Choices (10m) Or Compassion is Natural (10m) Bake Sale Planning (10 m) Closing Words (5m)</p>	<p>Week Two: Compassion and Mixed Emotions (90 min) Opening words (5m) Check ins (10 m) Hymn: Filled With Loving Kindness (10m) Game: Emoji Puzzles (10m) or What Love Is (12 minutes) Art: Comfort Boxes (10m) Practice: Loving Kindness (10m) Bake Sale Planning (10 m) UU Connections: Clara Barton (20m) Closing Words (5m)</p>
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<p>Week Three: Compassion as Action (90 min) Opening words (5m) Check ins (10 m) Hymn: Spirit of Life (10m) Game: Hard Conversations (10m) UU Connection: Dorothea Dix (20m) Art: Care Cards AND Sharing Our Thoughts and Stories (10m) Bake Sale Planning (10 m) Justice: Care Packages (10m) Closing Words (5m)</p>	<p>Week Four: Compassion, Nature, and Death (90 min) Opening words (5m) Check ins (10m) Game: Graveyard (10m) OR Ghost in the Graveyard (10m) Practice: Nature Mandalas (10m) Art: Luminaries AND Sharing Our Thoughts and Stories(10m) Hymn: When I Am Frightened (10m) UU Connection: Unitarians and the Utes (20m) Media: Knock at the Door (10m) Closing Words (5m)</p>
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Opening and Closing Words

Choose the opening and closing words that you would like to use for each session. It can be effective to use the same words all month, inviting youth to go deeper with a reading and hearing new inspiration from it through repetition. Or you might prefer to have fresh and different words at each session. You could provide all of the readings and invite a youth to choose the one they would like to read. Or use a random method and print all the words out and have youth draw one from an envelope or other container to read.

Opening Words Options

- [Stirrings of Compassion](#) by Nica Eaton-Guinn
 - Suggested change to the 3rd line:
 - Instead of “the invasion of Ukraine”
 - Change to: any current issue that is in the news or on the hearts of those present
- “There is no question for which compassion is not the answer”, by Judith Hanson Lasater •

[The Hearth of the Chalice](#) by Bear W Qolezcua

- [Sacred](#) by Robin F Gray

- **Come Into This Circle**

Rev. Scott Tayler

(Edits permitted)

Come into this circle of compassion and care.

Bring your worry and wounds,
your longings and hopes.

With word and song,
we rekindle the connection

that mends what's been torn.

With stillness and the space to pause,
we restore our strength
for the work that must be done.

The work of love.

The work of peace.

The work of repair.

The work of remembering we are not alone.

Let us begin.

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Closing Words Options

- [May our wisdom show itself](#) by Philip Randall Giles
- [Go in peace. Live simply](#) by Mark Belletini
- [Loving and Responsible Action](#) by Robert F Kaufmann
 - Suggested line change in last sentence:
 - Instead of “morning ...”
 - Change to: whatever time you are meeting
 - Instead of “a time of worship”
 - Change to “a time of cultivating our compassion”
- [May Love Permeate](#) by Becca Reynolds
- **The Tenderness that Makes Us Fierce**
 - *Rev. Scott Tayler*
 - [\(Edits permitted\)](#)
 - May compassion lead us closer to the broken and brokenhearted.
 - May that proximity prove, once again, that we all suffer as equals.
 - And may those shared struggles give us the courage
 - to act, not just feel,
 - to confront the cruelty, not be numbed by it,
 - to protest, not just offer prayers.
 - May the tenderness of our hearts, friends,
 - make us fierce about fixing the world.
- **May love always be at your center...**
 - *Rev. Linda Barnes*
 - May you embrace your growing with compassion.
 - May courage be yours as you answer your heart's calling.
 - May beauty and wonder be yours even when the going gets rough.
 - And may love always be at your center.
 - May it be so.

Check In Prompts

Checking in is a group process step that invites participants to share what is important in their lives outside of the group and helps youth get to know each other better. We offer both theme-specific check-in prompts and more general ones that leave room for a variety of sharing. Adult leaders can choose a prompt, or youth could select the prompt they would like to respond to for the session.

General Prompts

- **Rose, Thorn, Bud:** Name a “rose” or something joyful from this week, a “thorn” or something hard about this week, and a “bud” or a hopeful thing for your future
- **Weather Report:** If your life right now were given as a weather report, what would it be? Stormy, sunny, chance of showers?
- **Highs and Lows:** What was a high point for you recently and what was a low point?
- **High, Low, and Buffalo:** a high, a low, and another extra thing you want to share about - your “Buffalo”

Seasonal Prompts

- What is your favorite aspect of the autumn season?
- What is your favorite of all the Halloween costumes you’ve ever worn and why? •

What is something that you are afraid of?

- In this season of harvest, what are you harvesting right now, either literally or metaphorically?

Extra Options: Prompts from the Young UU Project

- <https://www.uua.org/blueboat/youth/favorite-check-ins>

Sharing Our Thoughts & Stories

Sometimes the best youth activity is to just hang out and share our stories and thoughts on the monthly theme. The questions in this section are designed to support such conversations that bond youth at a deeper level.

There are many ways to use these questions. You can pick the 2-3 you think will resonate best with your youth and ask them of the whole group. Or you could have a youth or two be in charge of looking over them and picking the 2-3 for the group to discuss. You could also print and cut them out into individual strips of paper, put them in a bag or cup (what youth often call a “fishbowl” activity), and then have youth take turns picking one and answering it. If you choose this second approach, be sure to tell the youth they are welcome to pass and pick another one, if the question makes them uncomfortable.

It is also highly effective to offer a discussion prompt at the same time that youth are engaged with an art or craft activity, as busy hands can actually help rather than hinder focus on stories and ideas. This is also helpful for neurodiverse or introverted youth as well.

Themed Questions for Discussion

- What does “compassion” mean to you? How would you explain compassion to a younger person who asked you what that word meant?
- What in the world today inspires your sense of compassion? Who or what are you feeling compassion for right now?
- Who or what shows you compassion? Have you ever received compassion from something non-human (a pet, plant, animal, nature itself)?
- What are you doing to [stay tender and compassionate](#) when our cruel political culture wants you numb?
- Have you ever experienced [compassion fatigue](#)? Compassion fatigue is a form of emotional burnout that arises when we are overexposed to the suffering of others or overidentify with the suffering happening around the world. Some youth describe it simply as “caring too much” about a person or social issue.
- Can you be angry and compassionate at the same time? When have you felt both, and when has anger interfered with compassion? What about fear? Grief?
- Are there people that you find particularly difficult to feel compassion toward? When is compassion really challenging for you? Are there people you think don’t deserve compassion? Why?

- How does compassion relate to power? Do you find it easier to feel compassion for those less powerful or more powerful than you? Is there any special obligation for more compassion that comes with more power or privilege?
- What does “self-compassion” mean to you? Where in your life are you withholding compassion from yourself, and how does this impact your ability to extend it to others?
- What would change if you spoke to yourself with the same kindness you offer your closest friend during their struggles?

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Spiritual Practices, Rituals, and Meditations

Anything can be a spiritual practice if approached with that intention, so we believe that all of the activities in our packets are spiritual practices, but some are more explicitly so. Here are a few options for doing ritual, spiritual practice, and meditation together.

1. Loving Kindness Meditation (10 minutes)

The Loving Kindness, or Metta, Meditation comes to us from Buddhism and is a commonly practiced meditation that has inspired a UU hymn (#1031 [Filled With Loving Kindness](#)). There are many versions of the meditation that can be found, so feel free to choose one you like. [This version](#) from the Tapestry of Faith curriculum A Place of Wholeness is one we recommend.

Alternatively, you could play this recording to follow: [10-Minute Lovingkindness Meditation with Sharon Salzberg](#)

2. Moon Meditation of Kuan Yin (10 minutes)

Materials needed: statue or image of [Kuan Yin](#)

Kuan Yin is the Goddess of Compassion in Chinese Buddhist tradition, and is understood to have been a bodhisattva (an enlightened being who chooses to remain on earth as a teacher for others or a reincarnation of the Buddha depending on the interpretation or particular tradition of Buddhism). This simple meditation uses visualizations of Kuan Yin and can be enhanced by having the statue or image of Kuan Yin where all participants can gaze on her as you read the meditation.

The meditation script is by Cherry Gilchrist: [The Moon Meditation of Kuan Yin – Cherry's Cache](#)

3. Nature Mandalas (10 minutes)

Materials needed: dark construction paper for each participant, a large variety of natural objects such as leaves, grass, dried wheat, flowers, pinecones, acorns, rocks, feathers, and sticks

Compassion for self and others is about feeling connected and knowing we are all part of the interdependent web. This meditation can be a creative and embodied way to focus on this interconnectedness.

You can see examples of nature mandalas here: [Creating a Nature Mandala - Sprouting Wild Ones](#)

Give each participant a piece of paper to arrange their mandala upon. Have the variety of natural objects within easy reach of everyone, so either all gather around a table or give each participant their own variety of objects near their seat.

Direct participants to focus on how they are connected to all other life and to imagine a flow of compassion and love between all things. Have them choose a center object to ground and focus their mandala.

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Tell them to keep breathing and focusing on compassion and connection as they choose other objects to arrange in a mandala around the central object. Tell them their mandala can be symmetrical and round, but it does not have to be. This is for them, and the arrangement and shape they make is up to them.

Ask them to move slowly and with intention, continuing to focus on compassion and connection. There is no hurry.

After your time is up, gently draw the meditation to a close either by ringing a bell or simply saying “and now we draw our practice to a close with one last deep breath in and out”

If you like you can invite sharing about the meditation, or you can simply close the practice and move on.

Hymns

Our Unitarian Universalist hymns and beloved songs are a way to feel connected to the larger Unitarian Universalism beyond your congregational walls, as we are likely to encounter familiar music when we visit or move to another UU congregation. The hymns may also be encountered at Youth CONs or Camps or campus ministry. They also can help youth bridge from their youth focused or youth group experiences to the main worship congregational experiences they will encounter as adults.

Hymn Exploration Activities, approximately 10 minutes each For each hymn that you explore, provide hymnals or a copy of the hymn for each participant. When possible, consider having someone play piano or guitar with the hymn (if you have musicians among your youth, invite them to prepare to lead a hymn in a session). Hymns can also be sung acapella, without accompaniment, and this is a good option as well. If a hymn is particularly difficult to sing, we encourage you to still play a recording for appreciation of that hymn. Some hymns may have specific reflection prompts provided, but for all hymns we suggest discussing these or similar prompts:

- How does the hymn make you feel? Do these feelings come from the lyrics, the music, both, or something else about the hymn?

- What images or phrases in the hymn stand out for you and why?
- What does this hymn have to say to our understanding of Unitarian Universalism? What does it say about who we are as UU's?

Hymns for Building Belonging

1. #1031 Filled With Loving Kindness

This simple chant takes the traditional Buddhist loving kindness meditation and sets it to music.

Recording: [May I Be Filled With Loving Kindness, music by Rev. Ian Ridell](#)

Discussion prompts:

- How is “loving kindness” the same and how is it different from compassion? How does it feel to be “filled with loving kindness”?
- Who do you picture in your mind when you sing “may *you* be filled with loving kindness”? Who would you like to send this intention for loving kindness out to?

2. #123 Spirit of Life

This beloved hymn is widely sung throughout the UU denomination, and is a simple enough song to sing acapella. Many children's programs learn this song, sometimes with hand gestures as well, and it has become an important part of UU identity for many raised in this faith. The hymn was written by Carolyn McDade as a personal prayer, an invocation of renewal and hope when she felt drained and hopeless from her justice work.

Recording: [Spirit of Life by Carolyn McDade](#)

Discussion Prompts:

- What “stirrings of compassion” are singing in your heart?
- When do you need the spirit of life to come to you? When have you needed a prayer like this?

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3. #1012 When I am Frightened

This hymn was written with children and youth in mind and has a message about how youth learn by seeing how adults *are*, not just what they *say*. It is a beautiful little song about relationships, and easy to sing. Interestingly, all the recordings I reviewed have wildly varying tempos and it seems this hymn is sung at many different paces.

Recording: [Teal 1012 "When I am Frightened"](#)

Discussion Prompts:

- Did any particular people come to mind as you sang this song? Who is there for you when you are frightened, angry, or troubled?
- Who has shown you compassion? Who would you like to “learn to care as they do”?

4. There is a Love

This [UU song written by Rev Dr Rebecca Parker](#) and Elizabeth Norton is not included in our hymnal, but is a newer song expressing a meditation on love and connection. It is accessible and simple to sing even for those unfamiliar with it. The recording I've picked out is pitched a bit high, if you are singing this acapella for everyone you might want to start lower pitched.

Recording: [There is a Love](#)

Discussion Prompts:

- What types of love are “holding you”? What sort of love do you think this song is about? • Have you ever felt like you could “rest in” love? What does it mean to “rest in” something?

UU Connections

Each of these activities is an opportunity to go deeper with an aspect of Unitarian Universalism that relates to the theme of the month, grounding our meetings and explorations further in the roots and practices of our particular faith tradition.

1. Dorothea Dix and Compassion for People with Mental Illness (20 minutes)

In the first half of the 19th century Unitarianism in America was still very young, but its message of love and dignity for all inspired the work of reformer Dorothea Dix who worked to understand and improve the conditions for people suffering from mental illness. Her work impacted how we treated people in need of care, and illustrates how UU values can be applied to actual concerns in our world.

Watch this short video: [Dorothea Dix](#)

And/or read aloud this story: [Dorothea Dix | Windows and Mirrors | Faith Curriculum Library, Tapestry of Faith | UUA.org](#)

Reflect using these or similar prompts:

- How does learning about UU's putting their values into action in the world change or affect your understanding of this tradition? Why does it matter what UU's have done versus what they have taught or believed?
- Is compassion a value or a belief or is it a verb? Can you "have" compassion? Can you "do" compassion? *Must* you "do" something if you have compassion?
- What current issues in our world today are we called to respond to as UU's, like Dorothea Dix was called in her time? Can you imagine dedicating 40 years to changing something for the better, as she did?

2. Clara Barton, Compassion and Struggle (20 minutes)

Clara Barton was inspired by her Universalist faith to work as a nurse during the Civil War, but also was deeply frustrated by the lack of rights for women. In her story we see how compassion is not always just gentle and calm, but can come with deep anger or sorrow.

Read aloud this piece about Clara Barton: [Clara Barton | Resistance and Transformation | Faith Curriculum Library, Tapestry of Faith | UUA.org](#)

Reflect using these or similar prompts:

- Where do you see compassion at work in this story about Clara Barton? Where do you see Universalism in her story?
- Does anger or frustration, such as Clara Barton expressed, work with or against compassion? Can you be angry and compassionate? When would anger cancel out compassion? ● What makes you angry in the world right now? What does your anger motivate you to do? ● Can you practice compassion for your own anger and for yourself?

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3. Unitarians Trying to “Save” the Utes (30 minutes)

In 2009 at the General Assembly in Utah, the UUA offered a formal apology to the Ute tribe for the actions of Unitarians that contributed to the Utes losing their way of life and ancestral lands. It is an interesting example of compassion without understanding leading to bad results, and a time when Unitarians made a profound mistake.

Read aloud this UU World article: [Unitarians worked to 'save' Ute Indians | UU World Magazine](#)

Reflect together with these or similar prompts:

- What do you imagine the Unitarian ministers who worked with the Utes wanted to accomplish? What might their motivations have been and how do those motivations relate to Unitarianism? ● Does it change your understanding of Unitarian Universalism to learn about this piece of our history? How do you feel about this story?
- When have you seen compassion not being enough? What else is needed to go with compassion?

Media

More and more people are primarily learning about the world through audio and video media, and the written word is understood to not be the only or best way for everyone to learn. While we who grew up in generations and cultures that prioritized the written word may have mixed feelings about this, the use of other media can be a very effective way to reach younger people. These videos have been selected as good spring points for conversations on the theme.

1. On Self-Compassion for the Hard Choices Our Previous Selves Had to Make (10 minutes)

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jA0FUKJFNZM> (Start at minute 2:17)

This reflection is a great exploration of how hard we can be on our previous selves and what we might do instead.

Before playing the video, invite the youth to listen for one particular line or moment from the video that stands out for them.

After listening to the story, reflect with these or similar prompts:

1. How do you forgive yourself when you have or are failing? Who has helped you do that?
- 2.

Knowing what you know now, how do you feel about choices your past self made? Can you feel compassion for your younger self? What advice would you give your younger self? 3. Some say that regret is a dangerous feeling since it can sometimes be a form of beating yourself up. Do you agree? How might you help a friend be more compassionate to themselves when they were full of regret for something they did in the past?

2. What Love Is (12 minutes)

Video: <https://andreagibson.substack.com/p/what-love-is> (6 min)

A beautiful story and poem about what to do when you feel stuck between personal compassion and social justice compassion.

Before playing the video, invite the youth to listen for one particular line or moment from the video that stands out for them.

After listening to the story, reflect with these or similar prompts:

1. In this poem the poet calls themselves a failed activist. What does this have to teach us about compassion?
2. Have you ever felt pulled between two needs and not been able to meet them both? How did you choose? Were you forgiven and given compassion after that choice?
3. “The earth, who has never not known love, held me anyway”. What or who holds you no matter what?

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3. Compassionate Care During Covid 19 (10 min)

Video: [A Brief But Spectacular take on compassionate care during COVID-19 | PBS News](#) (3:31)

This is a short reflection from a palliative care doctor about caring for people as they die, please provide a content warning before playing the video.

Before playing the video, invite the youth to listen for one particular line or moment from the video that stands out for them.

After listening to the story, reflect with these or similar prompts:

1. What line or moment from the video stood out for you? Why do you think it struck you? Did it stir up a memory from your own life? Or did it offer you a sense of comfort or challenge?
2. This type of care, palliative care, is relatively new and not all medical care providers are trained to be compassionate like this. What jobs in our society do you think should always include training in compassionate care?
3. Do you have a story of a time you encountered someone who didn’t show compassion, and how might that have been better for you if they had more compassion?

4. Compassion is Natural (10 min)

Video: [Compassion is Natural. So Why is It So Hard For Us? | Big Think](#) (3:30)

This is a short talk about what inhibits our natural compassionate instincts.

Before playing the video, invite the youth to listen for one particular line or moment from the video

that stands out for them

After watching the video, reflect with these or similar prompts:

1. What line or moment from the video stood out for you? Why do you think it struck you? Did it stir up a memory from your own life? Or did it offer you a sense of comfort or challenge?
2. What challenges inhibit your own natural compassionate instincts? What have you learned or been socialized for that makes compassion hard?
3. Overall, how could we shift our culture to cultivate more compassion and lower these barriers to compassion?

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5. Grandma's Hands

Video: [Grandma's Hands - StoryCorps](#) (2:43)

This short, animated film illustrates a story about a grandma and how she brought comfort and safety to her grandchild.

Before playing the video, invite the youth to listen for one particular line or moment from the video that stands out for them

After watching the video, reflect using these or similar prompts:

1. What line or moment from the video stood out for you? Why do you think it struck you? Did it stir up a memory from your own life? Or did it offer you a sense of comfort or challenge?
2. Who has been a person that brought you comfort and care when you needed it? How did they show you compassion and care?
3. Do you have any stories of how your caregivers once received care? Like the child seeing the picture of great grandmother's hands, do you have anything that makes you feel close to ancestors (familial or other types of ancestors)?

6. A Knock at the Door (10 min)

Video: [A Knock at the Door - StoryCorps](#) (2:10)

This short, animated film illustrates a humorous story of cultural misunderstanding and Halloween.

Before playing the video, invite the youth to listen for one particular line or moment from the video that stands out for them.

After watching the video, reflect using these or similar prompts:

1. What line or moment from the video stood out for you? Why do you think it struck you? Did it stir up a memory from your own life? Or did it offer you a sense of comfort or challenge?

2. Have you ever been scared or confused by something and later learned it wasn't at all what you thought it was? How did that feel?
3. Can you imagine how Halloween might feel to someone who didn't know why it was happening? How does imagining a different perspective help you find compassion for others?
4. How do you feel about Halloween? Or scary movies? Why do you think some people like scary things?

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Creative Projects: Arts and Crafts

Art and craft activities aren't just for little kids; they remain a useful hands-on way to learn for all ages and create increased accessibility for many with neurodiversity. Listening and thinking is just easier for many of us if our hands are doing something. With the possibility of art and craft also being a "fidget", you can offer these projects early in your session plan and then allow those who want to continue working on them to do so while you move on to other activities at the same time.

1. Compassion Critters (15 + minutes)

Materials needed: felt, buttons, eyes, pipe cleaners, fabric markers or sharpies, scissors, hot glue guns and/or sewing needles and thread, stuffing

This activity has youth create a small stuffed creature that represents the qualities of compassion to them. There are full directions for this activity here: [Art with Ms. Paula Liz - Compassion Critters](#)

The website describes using hot glue, but this could also be done with sewing needles and thread, which would be more conducive to working and talking at the same time. Choose whichever seems more doable for your group.

If you do choose to sew the critters, you can move on to another activity while youth sew their critters, and then toward the end of the session invite sharing and show and tell about the critters.

2. Instant Comfort Boxes (10+ minutes)

Materials needed: small empty boxes (such as matchboxes, [Altoid tins](#), or small gift boxes) for each youth, variety of papers, scissors, markers, glue. Optionally extra materials could be: glitter, stickers, small charms, small shaped erasers, sequins or rhinestones, etc.

This is a fun project to create a message of comfort and compassion inside a little box, such as a matchbox. There are examples on this website: [4 Ideas to Foster Empathy and Gift Giving in the Art Room - The Art of Education](#)

Distribute the boxes and invite youth to create a message of comfort inside the box that would be revealed when it is opened. It can be as simple as a drawing inside the box, or it can be multimedia and have 3D elements.

Encourage youth to give their comfort box to someone else as a gift.

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3. Care Cards (10+ minutes)

Materials needed: blank notecards and envelopes, markers

This project can be coordinated with your pastoral care team ahead of time and customized for congregants who are currently struggling with something, or it can be general and then given to the pastoral care team or the minister for delivery. If you are coordinating ahead of time, you might just ask for the types of challenges congregants are facing but not specific names of congregants to maintain confidentiality.

Invite youth to create art on the cards that expresses care, sympathy, and compassion. They should leave the insides blank. Collect the cards afterward and give them to the minister or pastoral care team to be sent to congregants in need.

4. Paper Halloween Luminaries (5+ minutes)

Materials needed: paper, crayons, black sharpie markers, scotch tape, electric tea lights, small votive glass jars

Theme connection: Remind youth that part of the original meaning of Halloween, which comes from the Irish pagan holiday Samhain (*sow in*) is to remember the dead and show them hospitality and care on this night when the veil between life and death was understood to be thin. Making luminaries or jack o' lanterns is to light the path for all, so this is an action of care and loving memory.

There are instructions and examples on this website: [Paper Halloween Luminaries! Use our pattern or draw your own](#)

Pass out paper and invite youth to decorate it with a face or other design with the black sharpie marker. They can optionally color it with crayons, but that part won't show in the dark once the candle is lit inside. Tape the paper around the glass jar, and drop a candle inside it. In the dark, light the candle and enjoy!

Games

Games are a classic part of youth programming, and most of us know that they are fun and good energy breaks, but games can be a great learning tool as well. With the theme of Belonging these are all games that will help participants learn more about each other and start to build a sense of group identity. Use these suggested games as opportunities to actively build belonging in the group this month:

1. Emoji Puzzles (5-10 minutes)

Theme connection: Part of compassion is listening and trying to understand other people, and this game encourages youth to try and understand each other through emojis.

Materials needed: Devices that have emojis (tablets or smart phones) OR a [collection of emojis printed out](#) (use this option if anyone in your group doesn't own a device).

Best for: Groups of 2+

Have participants play in pairs, with one thinking of a phrase and then expressing it through emojis. Their partner tries to figure out the phrase. Depending on how hard you want to make the game, you can allow hints or not.

Once the phrase is figured out, switch. Play as many times as you like, switching to new partners.

2. Hard Conversations (10 minutes)

Theme connection: Having hard conversations with compassion can be a big challenge, and this role play activity allows youth to act this out.

No materials needed

Best for: groups of 2+

Ask for volunteers to be the first pair of actors to try and act out a difficult conversation in a compassionate way. One person will be trying to have the hard conversation with great compassion, and the other will be reacting. Depending on the level of difficulty you want, the person reacting can also try to stay compassionate or they can react in ways that make the conversation even harder (such as with anger, great sorrow, resistance, etc.).

Role play as long as it seems useful, then call "Scene" and switch players and roles

Suggested scenarios:

- A person breaking up with a romantic partner
- A boss firing an employee
- A child telling a parent the parent is doing something the child doesn't appreciate
- A person

confessing they've done something harmful to another person, such as accidentally losing their pet

- A roommate telling their roommate they are moving out and don't want to live together anymore

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3. Broken Hearts Cooperative Puzzles (5-10 minutes)

Theme connection: Working together the group will repair the broken heart

Materials required: A large posterboard heart, cut up into puzzle pieces (prep this ahead of time)

Best for: groups of 1+

Invite the group to work together to put the puzzle together. Don't tell them what shape it will make ahead of time.

4. Graveyard (5-10 minutes)

Theme connection: this game is mostly just fun that is loosely related to Halloween

No materials needed

Best for: Groups of 4+

Instructions here: [Graveyard - Great Camp Games](#)

One player is the grave keeper, watching over the graves. All the other players lie down in their "grave" with their faces showing, and must remain as still as possible. If the grave keeper sees them move, they rise from the dead and join the grave keeper in keeping watch over the other graves. The grave keeper(s) can try to provoke the other players into moving by telling jokes or other verbal provocations, but cannot touch the dead.

Game play continues until all have risen from the dead.

5. Ghost in the Graveyard (10 minutes)

Materials needed: a large, preferably outdoors, play space

Theme Connection: this is another fun game that is loosely connected to Halloween and best used in the session that connects to this holiday

Best for: groups of 4+

Instructions:

- Designate the boundaries of your play space and the safe "base"
- One participant is the "Ghost" and goes and hides anywhere within bounds other than the base
- Everyone else searches for the ghost. Whichever player finds the ghost should shout "Ghost in the Graveyard" loud enough for other players to hear. The player who found the ghost is now Safe, but the other players need to run back to the base.
- The Ghost chases everyone other than the Safe player and tries to tag one before they reach the safe base. If someone is tagged, they become the new ghost. If no one is tagged, the ghost hides again.

Justice, Service, and Fundraising Activities

Larger projects for service, justice, or fundraising are wonderful opportunities for youth to develop leadership skills and experiences. They are also a great chance for some multigenerational community building and bringing youth into relationship with parts of the congregation outside of religious education or youth group. These suggested activities may often be longer than will fit in a single session and require more planning time.

1. Pack Care Packages for Unhoused People (10 + minutes)

Materials needed: Ziplock bags (gallon and sandwich size), paper, pens. You might also provide packing materials if your group is small or likely to forget to bring anything. Suggested packings: non-perishable snacks, disposable water, juice, or electrolyte bottles, clean new socks, warm items like hats, gloves, and scarves, and hygiene supplies.

This is an activity to pack care packages for people who are unhoused in your community.

If your community has any organizations that pass out lifesaving and necessary supplies to people in need, you could coordinate this activity with them. However, almost every community has some people who are present and asking for help, usually by standing by the road with cardboard signs. People of more privilege will sometimes have nothing to give and may learn to avert their gaze and pretend they can't see these people asking for help, so making a care package and actually handing it out yourself can be a way of creating a human connection and an opportunity to practice compassion directly.

For this activity, invite youth to bring something to contribute to the care packages from the suggested list below, and then work together to share items out and pack a care package with a good assortment of needed items in it. Include a handwritten note expressing care and compassion for the person who will receive this package.

If you are giving the packages to an organization, collect them all at the end. If each participant is going to hand out their own package, send the packages home with youth. If you are planning this second option, give parents notice about this project and invite them to help their youth give out the care package if they have safety concerns. (This can be included in your family letter, see the appendix)

When you pack the care packages, place all toiletries that are scented in their own sandwich size Ziplock bag to separate them from the food items. Scented toiletries can make the food items taste bad, so are best kept separate.

Suggested items that youth might bring:

- Tuna packets
- Cheese and crackers snacks •
- Peanut butter tubes
 - Soft granola bars (often unboxed people have dental issues, avoid hard bars)
- Trail mix packets
- Beef jerky or meat sticks (look for softer ones, often unboxed people have dental issues)

2. Bake Sale Fundraiser

- Nonperishable canned fruit or pudding cups, plus a disposable spoon
- Bottles of water, juice, or sports drinks
- Batteries (AA or AAA) •
- Chemical hand or toe warmers
- Band-Aids
- Tissue packets

- Wet wipes
- Chapstick
- Cough drops
- Soap
- Toothbrush
- Toothpaste
- Dental floss or picks •
- Hand sanitizer
- Sunscreen (summer) •
- Bug repellent
- New clean socks
- Hats (seasonally sensitive) •
- Gloves and scarves

Running a bake sale during coffee hour can be an effective way for youth to raise funds for a good cause and also encourages some intergenerational interactions. Depending on your congregation, make sure that you have permissions from those who should give permission for this activity, and schedule it well in advance. Select a recipient for the funds raised by the bake sale, preferably by letting the youth choose through consensus or voting. There are many opportunities for youth leadership development:

- One youth could be in charge of running the process for selecting a recipient and notifying that recipient plus follow up with the congregational bookkeeper/treasurer/whoever will actually send the money raised
- One youth could do the publicity designs and postings, getting the word out ahead of time
- One youth could take lead on organizing the bakers (which can all be youth or you could recruit some adult bakers as well) so there is a good variety of baked good present
- One youth could be the cashier and handle money on the sale day itself and get the money deposited where it needs to go according to your congregational policies

If you choose to do the bake sale, we suggest that you have a bit of planning time built into each session ahead of your actual sale date.

However you want to run your bake sale, be sure the youth understand *why* they are doing this activity and what their goal is. Communicate to the congregation where the money is going and *why* the youth chose this recipient. The idea is to make this about more than baking and about more than money ... it is also a chance to reflect on what the youth feel compassion and passion around, and to communicate that to the larger congregation.

Sample Parent Letter Template

Edit and send this before the beginning of the month

[Date]

Dear Parents and Caregivers,

October's theme is *Cultivating Compassion*, and this month the youth will explore compassion with games, art, music, and spiritual practices. They will also be exploring UU history and identity of both examples of great compassion and times we have fallen short.

Include these if you will be doing these activities:

We will also be creating care packages for unhoused people this month and sending them home with youth to distribute. Please assist your youth in remembering to bring something on [date] to pack inside the care packages and also in safely handing out their care package.

And on [date] we will be holding a bake sale fundraiser for a cause the youth will choose because it is important to them. We would love to have your help if you are a baker or your assistance to your young baker. Let us know if you can help!

Cultivating Compassion is also something that can be brought home! The four steps of compassion are Recognizing, Understanding, Empathizing, and Responding. How do you Recognize what is going on for your family members? How do you seek to Understand? And then how to you Empathize with them? And finally and perhaps most importantly, how do you Respond to them? Adolescents are going through some tumultuous emotional times, how can you as the adult give them compassion? And how can you cultivate their compassion for you? There is also the important practice of "self-compassion" that can help adolescents have more resilience for the many challenges they face in this life stage. A few suggested resources:

[Navigating Parent-Teen Dialogues With Compassion | Psychology Today](#)

[Teaching Compassion In Teens: Raising a Caring Teen](#)

[How Self Compassion Practices Affect Teen Mood Disorders in Teens](#)

And longer piece here: [Mindful self-compassion for teens | Karen Bluth](#)

If you have any questions or want to learn more please feel free to reach out. Thank you for being part of this shared journey of growth and discovery.

In faith and community,
[Your Name]
[Your Role in the Congregation]
[Contact Information]

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Sources of Support

RE Leader Facebook Page

Don't forget about our RE Leader Support Facebook page. Here is where our colleagues post bulletin board pictures and share books and ideas. It's a great ongoing source of support. Your colleagues are available to support you at the click of a button and with the ease of a post:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/545202255591601/>

Inspiration Facebook Page

Offer your teachers and parents spiritual nourishment and inspiration by encouraging them to join the Soul Matters Inspiration Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcircle/>

Soul Matters RE Packet Author: [Rev. Sara Lewis](#)



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