



Soulful Home

Finding the Sacred in
Our Everyday Spaces

September 2019 - Expectations

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A Blessing of Expectation

The Welcome Mat

What Does it Mean to be a Family of Expectation?

I was recently in a large bookstore, heading to the children's book section to browse. As I approached, I passed through the Parenting section, and below its large sign was a three-tiered shelf, each with front-facing books, making a veritable wall of these titles: What to Expect When You're Expecting, What to Expect the First Year, and What to Expect the Toddler Years. Clearly, the bookstore was banking on--even cultivating--parents' deep desire to know and prepare for what was to come in their families.

While at first expectation seems to be about looking ahead, it actually ties together the past and the future. In order to have an expectation about what is to come, we rely on past experiences and patterns--our own, or others'--to make those predictions. And then we give our expectations emotional weight--hope, dread, eagerness, entitlement. In these ways, our past can trip us up. We can unintentionally close our minds to new possibilities by making assumptions about what will happen next.

So, how did your past shape what you expected when your parenting journey began? How does it still shape it? And how does the reality of parenting--and we use that term broadly, for the work of adults taking part in raising a child--conform to or challenge all those expectations? You'll consider these and other questions in the On the Porch section, where you explore the theme with your support network.

Some of us were in the position where very little was expected of us when we became parents, and so we set our own firm expectations of self, based on what we knew to be right and true. And some of us were in the position of having so many varied and competing expectations foisted upon us that we had to listen very, very carefully for our own voice among the many telling us what we should or shouldn't do as guardians of children. Our monthly mantra helps us to do this with surprise and self-compassion.

Our At Play section engages the human mind's tendency to find patterns and anticipate--expect--certain actions to carry forward. By playing with the idea of expectation through hink pinks, fox walking, or red light / green light, we hope your entire family is more able to respond to unexpected outcomes with curiosity and adaptability. And our At the Bedside section offers a delightfully unexpected twist to a familiar fairy tale--with very funny results.

As we hope you have come to expect of us here at Soulful Home and Soul Matters, we are engaging the tension in this month's theme head-on, using our favorite tools, connection and play to move from wherever we are in our lives to a place of more understanding, love, and justice. Thanks for opening your hearts and homes to us. Are you ready? Green light!



At the Table

Exploring Expectation Through Discussions

At the Table questions explore the monthly theme through a discussion for all ages. They are designed for a family gathering - maybe during a Friday night meal, a quiet moment in the living room or before a board game night.

Introducing the Activity

Family members who are readers can alternate who reads the questions. Those who are not readers are invited to share their own impromptu questions. Discussion partners might answer as thoughts come to them or take turns in a circle.

1. What do you expect from your parents / foster parents / grandparents?
2. What's the biggest expectation you have of yourself? Who taught you the value of having expectations, or holding yourself and others to a high standard of behavior or achievement?
3. Are having high expectations of yourself always helpful, or are there times when it's best to let go of expectations and roll with whatever happens?
4. If you were trying to do something really big, who (outside our family) would you expect would come to help when you asked? How would you thank them?
5. Who cheers you on? Like the Little Engine That Could, who do you count on to tell you "You can do it?"
6. We hang out in many places and with many groups: school, scouts, church, our friends' houses. Which of these places have the most rules (expectations) and which have the least? How do you feel about having a lot or only a few expectations/rules put on you?
7. How does it feel when you don't meet someone's expectations of you?
8. Do you feel that others have expectations of your generation? If so, what are they?
9. What do you expect you will be when you grow up?
10. If you had to predict one cool thing that will happen in the future, what would it be?
11. If you could go back five years, what one thing would you tell your former self to expect in your own future? (In other words, what's something you most wish you would have known about ahead of time and been able to prepare for?)
12. If someone threw you a surprise birthday party, who would you most expect to see there?
13. What do your pets, or animals in your neighborhood, expect when they see you?
14. We sometimes create expectations based on our assumptions rather than actual facts or experiences. Whom do you least expect you'd have something in common with? What makes you think that?
15. How do you expect to feel when you go to the doctor's office? The dentist? The therapist's? The barber/salon? Do you think other clients and customers feel the same way?

Ways to Return to the Discussion Throughout the Week

Thoughts develop with time. Find opportunities to bring up particularly compelling questions again during the month, maybe on walks, rides home, when tucking your child in to bed, etc. If thoughts grew or changed, notice that together, how we are all evolving beings, opening ourselves to new truths and understandings as we live our lives and connect with others.



Around the Neighborhood

A Treasure Hunt for Back-to-School & Back-to-the-Library Expectations

Around the Neighborhood activities engage families with their surroundings through the lens of the theme. It's about perceiving your well-known world in new ways. Take our monthly treasure hunt list with you on your trips to the grocery, walks around the neighborhood or bike rides, and transform your everyday travel into a family adventure.

Expectations are often the highest this time of year. When school starts we expect surprises, but we also hope for at least some familiar things. This treasure hunt encourages us to look for and talk about both. For school kids, it's meant to be done after your child comes home, to help them share and think through their first weeks back to school--maybe the school they attended last year, maybe a new school. For parents of young children, and homeschooling families, apply this same idea to making a trip to the library after the bustle of summer reading programs has passed. See how many of these experiences your child noticed while coming back:

- Seeing a familiar teacher or librarian from last year
- Smelling fresh pencil shavings
- Hearing the spine of a brand-new book creak as it opens for the first time
- Feeling or hearing the squeak of shoes on newly waxed floors
- Learning new kids' names
- Realizing you remember learning something and can still do it, even though you haven't thought about it all summer (this one might apply especially well to math, art, or music)
- Noticing who or what has changed the most over the summer (maybe a friend or adult, but maybe the arrangement of tables and chairs, the color of paint on the wall, etc.)
- Noticing how YOU'VE changed relative to this familiar environment (being able to reach somewhere without getting a step stool, having taken a class now in every hallway of the building, being able to read a sign for the first time, etc.)
- Evidence of the seasons beginning to change on the school or library grounds



At Play

Playing Games with Expectation

At Play activities and questions are a way to joyfully, playfully, and imaginatively experience the theme. We offer a brief framework to introduce the game and another to reflect upon it, so that the insights learned in play can stay with us throughout the month and beyond.

Option A: Expecting Rhymes with Hink Pinks

Hink Pinks are word puzzles where players get clues that lead them to the two rhyming-word answers. It takes a few hink pinks to get the hang of it, but once your brain perceives the pattern, it gets easier. This game is about training yourself on the expectation, and then delivering the fun! Quiz each other with the following soulful home hink pinks:

1. Talking to God through the fur on your head (prayer hair)
2. Insect embrace (bug hug)
3. No more war among people who enjoy sheep wool (peace fleece)
4. A feeling of deep and soulful caring among people who wear clothes on their hands (love glove)
5. Our planet coming into the world (Earth birth)
6. A trip on an ambulance bed (journey gurney)
7. Small mammal with poor eyesight and a unique spirit within (mole soul)
8. Large, flat, circular, metal instrument that one strikes with a hammer and a piece of music to sing (gong song)
9. Toothed tool you run through your hair where you live (comb home)
10. A cup with a stem and a foot in the fancy castle (chalice palace)



Option B: Expecting Each Other with Fox Walking & Red Light/Green Light

In both of these games (and the first one can be done as an activity rather than a competition, if you have a kiddo who prefers that), the goal is to thwart the expectations of your opponent. One player knows the others are coming--therein lies the tension, and the source of the joyful adrenaline rush! Recognizing that expectations don't always match to the oncoming reality, and being willing to adjust to that, is an important skill for growing up, as is expecting a challenge and knowing that we can rise to meet it.

Fox Walking

This game comes from the field of outdoor education. Fox walking is a special kind of sneaking where someone steps quietly and carefully, from the outer sole of the foot to the ball and toes, and lastly the heel, shifting the weight slowly so as not to make much sound with one's feet on the ground.

Here's a good video on the technique from the yoga education organization, Wanderlust:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=79&v=Lc9djQD2rhg

Once you have tried fox walking a few times, practice sneaking up on each other! One person sits quietly, blindfolded or with eyes closed, listening intently and expecting to hear sounds of the other player. The other person goes a distance away, and then fox walks to the blindfolded person. When the blindfolded person hears the fox walker, they call out; the fox walker gets one or two more tries to be silent (or more, if you are playing with young children), and if they make it to within six feet of the blindfolded person, they win! Then, the blindfolded person and the fox walker switch places.

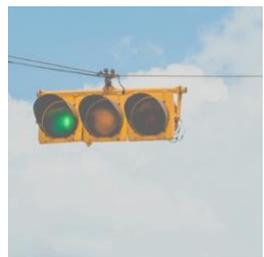
Red Light / Green Light

Red light / green light is a game of expecting the red light and being ready to freeze!

Here's a good explanation of the game:

<https://childhood101.com/games-for-kids-red-light-green-light/>

One great thing about Red Light / Green Light is that it can easily be played on a basketball court or other large, smooth area so that folks who use mobility aids can fully participate.



On the Message Board

A Monthly Mantra

The On the Message Board section lifts up a theme-related mantra for your family to carry with them throughout the month. Think of these “family sayings” as tools for the journey, reminders that help us re-focus and steady ourselves and our kids as we navigate through life’s challenges and opportunities. Write them on sticky notes to put in your car, on kitchen cabinet fronts, in lunch boxes, on computer screens and, of course, on your family message board. Share them out loud at home and out in the world, where and whenever the need arises.

September’s Mantra: “Stop shoulding on yourself!”

When I am caught up in my own expectations or complaining about having let myself down, spending a lot of mental and emotional energy thinking about what I *should* do, or *should have done* instead of what I did or didn’t do, my dear UU friend Shari says to me, “Stop shoulding on yourself!” And that never fails to make me giggle! Laughter is, of course, a welcome antidote to all that circular or stuck thinking, and the surprise of the statement jolts me back into self-compassion.

This month’s mantra is for when you hear your child or yourself saying, “I *should have done* _____,” or “You *should* _____” or “(So-and-so) *should have* _____.” Playfully interrupt that idea with “Stop shoulding on yourself!” or “Don’t should on me!” or “Don’t should on them!”

Instead, get curious about why your expectations for yourself or another didn’t match up with reality, and see if there’s a way or two to still move forward. You could play around with changing “should have” to “could have,” and then talk about the different outcomes that might have come from a different choice.



At the Bedside

Expecting Surprises in a Familiar Fairy Tale

The Bedside activities engage the theme through storytelling. This takes place during the dreamy, almost otherworldly hour or so before children or youth drift off to sleep. Through stories and the questions and realizations that they prompt, we come to understand the nature of and our own place in the cosmos. But also, these selections invite you to remember, shape, and share stories from your own past, using thoughtful narratives to help your child weave the tale of who they are and whose they are.

Have you ever heard the expression, “a Cinderella story”? That phrase is often used to describe something lovely happening to someone kind. It is wonderful when such things occur, but we know that more often than a person’s good heartedness, it is that person’s social connections, material wealth, education, etc. that create the opportunity for them to enjoy benefits. This is privilege.

This month, rather than accepting the fairy tale at face value and blithely assuming that good things happen to people who are good, we’re going to playfully turn that expectation on its head. We’re going to read a very special version of Cinderella--the spoonerized version!* A spoonerism is when the first syllables of two words are transposed, often to humorous effect.

If your family is already familiar with the Cinderella story, your brains will make sense of the spoonerized version quickly. If you are not already familiar with it, read the typical version first, and the spoonerized version a few days later.

Here’s a straight-forward version of Cinderella:

<https://www.storiestogrowby.org/story/cinderella-fairy-tale-english-story-for-kids/>

And here is the spoonerized version. Be sure to practice it a few times before telling it and be sure to read it out loud!

<https://matthewgoldman.com/anns-prinderella-the-cince/>

And if you need to hear it to get a better idea of how it goes, here’s a video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iu8V9OYPNhU>

Hopefully, after reading the above together, you will be laughing so hard that you need a few minutes to recover. But once you do, consider the following questions to promote deeper understanding and sharing:

Have you ever been able to be a kind of real-life fairy god person for another, helping to make something better when the person expected things to go badly? Has someone ever done this for you? (Have a story ready to share with your child from this happening in your own life.)

If you were in the Cinderella story, who would you be? What would you do the same or differently than was done in the story?



The spoonerism version of Cinderella was funny partly because some of the words sounded so silly. What are some other parts of the “real” story that are silly, absurd, or odd? (Use these questions to probe a bit into some of the assumptions about gender norms, patriarchal society, what it means to like or romantically love someone, etc.)

If a fairy god person came to this room, right now, and offered to grant your wish, what would it be? (Share what your own wish would be, too.)

*Special acknowledgement and thanks to Laurel Amabile, whose hysterical retelling of this story each year at R.E. Week at The Mountain, a Unitarian Universalist summer camp and retreat center, inspired this month’s activity.



On the Porch

Raising a Child of Expectation Together

On the Porch supports sharing realizations, challenges and hopes around the theme with other supportive adults. It connects parents with their co-parents, with their close circle of supporters, with extended family or whomever they turn to for love and fellowship. Perhaps this happens on a literal porch or front stoop, but it could happen wherever parents and their circle of support gather and talk over the soulful parts of parenthood.

The experiences described below are intentionally left open-ended to make way for wherever your conversation might take you, and whatever take-aways are most meaningful for you.

A Sip of Something More

Author and activist Parker Palmer talks about the value of bringing a “[third thing](#)” into conversations among partners or small groups—words, pictures, music, etc. that can act as catalysts for deeper sharing. We present that idea as “a sip of something more,” a monthly source of nourishment that tantalizes and brings to mind a new insight, memory, or feeling. So as you head to the porch with your parenting companion, don’t bring just your usual cup of coffee or tea; also take with you this additional “conversation partner”:

“First Lesson,” by Philip Booth

<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/first-lesson/>

Suggested Structure: Read Phillip Booth’s poem aloud a total of three times, taking turns between you and your parenting companion to help give it “a different voice” each time.

- After your first reading, share which line or phrase spoke to you the most and why.
- On your second reading, listen to it through the lens of your personal history, asking yourself, “What memory does this lead me back to?” Then share this memory with each other.
- And on your third reading, listen to it from the perspective of your current parenting hopes and challenges, asking, “How is this inviting me and my family to open to live and love with expectation in new ways?”

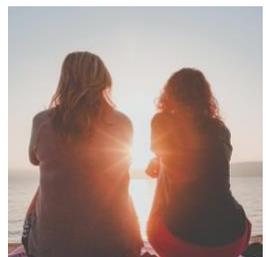


Spiritual Snacks to Share

In addition to your “third thing,” bring one or two of these questions with you when the time comes to hang out with your co-parent or buddies. Don’t treat the questions as a list to go through one by one. Instead pick the one or two that speak to you the most, using them as bite-sized opportunities to dive deeper into the role of parent, partner, or person of spirit and conscience.

- Did you notice anything new this month about how your expectations as a parent differ from other parents? Did that help reinforce your own style or invite you to rethink the expectations you have for yourself, your partner and your children?
- If you have a parenting partner, how do your parenting expectations differ? How might that be good or challenging? Do you think you talk that through with each enough?
- As you’ve gotten older, do you expect more of life or less of life? How about people? Has age convinced you to expect the best or the worst in them?
- Who helps you remember that people really can change?
- Do you believe in the law of attraction, or like-attracts-like, which states that we should expect what we put out into the universe through our visualizations and actions to come back to us? If so, how has this worked for you? If not, what do you find problematic about this idea? How do you think it might be applied to your parenting?
- In what ways is parenting what you expected, and in what ways is it different from what you expected? How is the journey of parenting surprising you the most?
- What do you want your child to know most about being “a person of expectation”? What lesson about expectations do you most want to sink in for them?
- Which one of your expectations for your child is quickly approaching its shelf life? What might you do now as a parent to best transition your child (and you) out of that expectation and into a new one?

Deeper Reflection: Contemplating how we have or have not met our own and others’ expectations can be rough on a person, spiritually. Remember the value of letting go of expectations if they no longer fit, or if we simply need a break from “thrashing toward our islands.” Also, remember the important connection between being “a person/family of expectation” and being “a person/family of forgiveness/apology/beginning again.” If we are let down by failed expectations, we can take responsibility for our part in the disappointment, reconnect, atone, and assess whether we’re willing and able to make different choices in the future. What’s your work in all this?



The Extra Mile

Take a Penny Hike or Drive

Sometimes the best journeys are those without destinations. Letting a hike or a drive unfold in unexpected ways is a reminder that we don't always have to be in control or bend our paths to fit our exact desires.

As a child, Rev. Jan Taddeo and her family became masters at this spiritual discipline by taking what they called "penny hikes," which involved flipping a coin at every fork in the trail or road to determine which way they would go. You can read about the impact this left on Rev. Taddeo by following the link below.

With her story as inspiration, make time this month to take your own Penny Hike or Drive!

In the spirit of letting life lead you into the unexpected, don't decide ahead of time what you hope to get out of the drive or hike. Don't determine its meaning or message until you are done. If you happen upon some hidden place--a quaint park, an out-of-the-way shop, a wayside farm stand--enjoy the moment and make plans later to return.

Crossing Bridges, Rev. Jan Taddeo

Full reflection at <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditation/crossing-bridges>

"Creating adventure was a theme in my family. My father would take us out on Sunday drives just to "get lost." He would say things like, "Let's just turn down this road and see where it takes us." My mother would take us on penny hikes, flipping a coin at each fork in the trail to see which direction to walk next. We explored trails, creeks, and went bushwhacking a few times, always looking for new adventures. Growing up with an appreciation for the unknown and creating adventures in unexpected ways has served me well..."



Blessing

Beloveds, whether you are beset by or bereft of expectations on you as a parent, we are holding you in love and light this month. Your family's journey continues the long, long path first traveled by your ancestors, but it is yours alone, and you are empowered to make new--or let go of--expectations. May your expectations for love and goodness in the world be wildly exceeded this month, but in case they are not, may grace and the people who love and support you see you through. Blessed be!



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