

HOMELINKS AND OUR WHOLE LIVES JOURNALS

Among this program's fundamental goals are to forge a strong partnership between the organization hosting the program and the families participating in it as well as a strong bond between adults and their children. Each workshop has a HomeLink handout/email that connects families to the session topic and supports further learning.

HomeLinks are based on a primary premise of Our Whole Lives: that sexuality education begins at home, that a parent/caregiver is a child's most important sexuality educator, and that communication between classroom and home reinforces the values of respect, love, fairness, and responsibility that serve as the foundation of sexuality education. HomeLinks are one key way that Our Whole Lives supports families in their sexuality educator role.

Provide HomeLinks in both paper and digital formats to each family after each workshop, since families have different preferences for viewing and sharing information. The digital format makes the material accessible to those who use screen readers or other accessibility software, as well as those who may prefer the format for other reasons. Always send the HomeLink out within a few hours after each workshop ends.

Our Whole Lives journals are another important part of this program. Parents and caregivers review a sample Our Whole Lives journal at the initial Parent/Caregiver Orientation, and each child receives their own journal in the first children's workshop. Throughout the program, children can add drawings to their journals and, with help writing, they express their feelings about workshop topics. To reduce the risk of journals being left at home, we recommend that Our Whole Lives journals be kept by the facilitators rather than traveling back and forth with the child between home and Our Whole Lives for each workshop. Children can bring in any HomeLink assignments they complete at home (stories, drawings, etc.), and facilitators can add these to each child's journal. Children will bring their journals home after the last workshop.

AFFIRMING DIVERSITY

When leading Our Whole Lives workshops, be sensitive to the family configurations, gender identities, and birth or other arrival stories of the children in your program. Create a welcoming environment. Reduce bias by providing diverse and inclusive images, books, and materials. Trained Our Whole Lives facilitators should be prepared to offer all children and families the respect they deserve.

ADAPTABILITY

A common question is whether and how the Our Whole Lives curriculum can be adapted, either for scheduling reasons or to suit specific interests of participants or organizations. Facilitators may add favorite songs, a welcoming activity, or a closing routine, but factual information and learning activities may not be removed or added. The exception would be if facilitators become aware of a medically accurate update, published by the CDC or other public health authority, that contradicts what is presented in the curriculum.

A specific group of participants may need to spend extra time on some topics and less on others, and the workshop agenda may be adjusted accordingly, but always be mindful of the contract between facilitators and parents/caregivers regarding program content. Significant variance from the program outlined in the Parent/Caregiver and Child Orientations endangers the trust you are trying to develop. Alert parents and caregivers to anything you may wish to share with the children from other sources, since they must be given the same chance to review these new materials as they had for the others.

Be aware, also, that if you remove or add significant activities, you are no longer teaching the Our Whole Lives program. The United Church of Christ and the Unitarian Universalist Association preserve the integrity of this program by requiring that adaptations of the curriculum be called by another name. You may indicate that the program you have created and renamed is “an adaptation of Our Whole Lives.”

While all the activities in this curriculum are appropriate for five- to seven-year-old children, the developmental level of individual participants may affect how activities are managed. For example, if all the children in your program are comfortable with writing, you may choose to have them write simple words and phrases in their journals, whereas if a significant portion of the children in your program are pre-readers and not writing comfortably yet, you would not. When preparing to facilitate workshops, consider the developmental stages of the participants in your group, and make the necessary adjustments.

CONCLUSION

Those who work with children in this age group are among the first adults outside the family to influence children’s perceptions of the larger community. The opportunity to build trust and a sense of comfort is one to cherish and treat with great care. We hope you take pride in participating in this program and enjoy your important role in helping children begin to understand and learn about themselves and about sexuality, which is crucial to becoming healthy and responsible adults.

Before using this curriculum, please check uua.org/re/owl/page-updates or ucc.org/owl/facilitator-resources for free, downloadable page updates. These are published on an as-needed basis, so please check the link each time you implement the program.