

JYM Small Groups

Small groups provide a way for us to both explore the theme and get to know each other in community. One of the most powerful things for children at this age is for them to feel that they are being truly listened to by others (of all ages) – so simply providing a safe and loving space for this to happen is a gift. Each small group runs no longer than 30 minutes.

In JYM, staffers and junior staffers are assigned to one of several small groups. The children are divided into clusters that then rotate through the small groups over the course of Saturday. Sometimes staffers present the same topic. With some themes, it is more important for the entire community to explore topics in a sequence, in which case you'll be presenting a different topic each time.

Begin by ensuring everyone has arrived at the group. Sometimes a child (or adult) heads to the wrong group. Starting each group with a brief period of worship, mediation, or gentle song helps to center, and relax, their racing little bodies.

Though I do a lot of the theme development, you are encouraged to make the group your own. You are on staff because I trust and celebrate your grounded presence, your personal spiritual journey, and your instincts and skills for being in spiritual community with children. Use what I offer as a *suggestion*, and tweak or completely overhaul it into what works for you, the children, *and the Spirit* in your presence. There have been incredibly creative “outside the box” JYM small groups over the years – you are encouraged to carry this legacy on.

Each cluster of children is different, with varying amounts of energy, input and approaches to the subject. Sometimes, what “works” nicely in one group may “crash” in the next! The order that they come through the topics affects how they approach them. And then there is the “energy factor!” Staff consistently report that they have more energy with the first two groups, and less with the last. If the group is just not working, let go of trying to stay on topic. Sing songs, play a game, go for a walk, or read a story together.

Each Small Group is provided with a supply of paper, markers, pens and pencils, scissors, tape, and glue. There is always clay for those who need something in their hands in order to focus better. (That would include me!) Some leaders use these resources, others do not.

Thank you for your generosity of time and love on behalf of our children. We are truly blessed.

Gretchen Baker-Smith