

Bodyworks, Version 2
March 19-21, 2021

Dear Parents and Guardians,

For 20 years, JYM and JHYM jointly offered a special retreat for 6th graders called Bodyworks. Three years ago we unrolled “version 2.” We are again offering this unique retreat experience to the 6th and 7th graders in NEYM – for the 2nd year via Zoom.

Our goals are to

- Celebrate and honor the amazing (changing) bodies and senses of self in our 6th and 7th graders within our spiritual community as Friends.
- Create a safe and joy-filled sanctuary where they can share thoughts, questions, and feelings about all that is going on within them physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually as well as within the wider culture.
- Provide accurate, age-appropriate information that nurtures and supports their physical, emotional, and spiritual health, encourages healthy relationships, and bolsters their self-respect.
- Deliver the message that they are unique, cherished, and sacred beings, and that self-care and self-respect are spiritual practices.
- Affirm the family members, teachers, and adult friends whom they know they can go to for help if/when they need it, and stress that we are always in their circle – no matter how many years go by.
- Give clear and loving guidance on getting help and stopping abuse of any kind.
- Encourage a culture where these conversations happen at other retreats and at Sessions.
- Laugh, play, sing, build friendships and community, eat well, share chores, and get some sleep!

While we have a basic outline of the content, the essence and flow of this retreat looks more like worship sharing or a clearness committee than a classroom lesson plan. Conversations go where the attenders lead. Topics we may touch upon include shifts in relationships (parents, school friends, those they’re attracted to and those they aren’t), emotions, sexual attraction, gender identity, body image, pornography, advertising, hopes and dreams, and the confusing world of peers. In and around all of this we will have a lot of fun – like at every JHYM Retreat.

The staff ratio for this retreat increases the availability of us answering questions, listening deeply, and carrying on conversations with individuals or small groups. Our staff are some of the finest youth workers I know, but those at this retreat are particularly selected for their grounded presence, and their comfort, appropriate humor, and sensitivity talking about these topics. Currently, our roster includes a mix from both JHYM and Young Friends. Maggie Nelson, the coordinator of Young Friends, will again be assisting with the program and leadership (hooray!).

While our theme centers on bodily and emotional changes, our experience is that what young people will cherish most in their hearts following this retreat is how they were celebrated and loved -- with their peers – in this beloved community. I hope your child will be able to join us.

Wishing you joy and Light,

Gretchen Baker-Smith, JYM-JHYM Coordinator
Maggie Nelson, YF Event Coordinator