

Dear Parents of Sixth Graders,

Welcome to an amazing year of child development and parenting! This letter will hopefully answer some questions and give you some encouragement about JYM and JHYM and your child's participation in either or both.

As you know, JYM is for children in grades 2-6 and JHYM is for children in grades 6-8. Acknowledging the wide range of development in this one amazing year, JYM and JHYM has let 6<sup>th</sup> grade be a "swing year" between the two programs. Our long standing policy has been to let 6th graders go to 1 JHYM Retreat at any point during the year, and then make a decision on whether to stay in JHYM or go back to JYM for the rest of the year.

I have been a major proponent of keeping this 6th grade year a "swing year." If they stay in JYM they have the opportunity to be "leaders" and elders of the community, and for some this is very powerful. In JHYM, they have the opportunity to be more with their developmental peers.

The most common reflection among kids who move up from JYM to JHYM is "I thought JHYM would be scary and that it wouldn't be as fun as JYM, but it was at least as much fun if not more so. We do more things together as a group and it's a place where you really are accepted for who you are." 6th graders have been remarkably successful in JHYM -- it's been pretty amazing. I refer to JHYM as my "Quaker boot camp" -- it is all about building an inclusive, safe and loving spiritual community.

JHYM doesn't have breakfast bubble gum, but it does have the name tag fairy. It doesn't have dress up, but it does play an infamous version of "contact" Big Wind Blows. JHYM small groups go longer than JYM, but the conversations are around the JH'ers everyday lives, and the vast majority of kids complain loudly if they don't get enough time in them on a weekend. In JHYM, we sing, do chores, have worship and Quiet Hour just like in JYM. JHYM plays more games and does more activities together as a large group than in JYM.

There you go. That's my plug for considering having your child attend a 6th grade retreat this fall and see if it is "for them." Please know that if you and your child decide to remain in JYM for the year that I will continue to love them unconditionally, trust they are right where they should be - and not pressure them to move up. Honest!

I am deeply grateful for your support and for your child's participation in our beloved community. Be in touch, as always, with questions or concerns, or ways that I could be supportive.

With love and thanks,  
Gretchen Baker-Smith, JYM-JHYM Coordinator, NEYM