

Zen Family Practice

The most important thing to remember when teaching this class is that young children (like all people) thrive on routines and consistency. They may not be able to talk yet, but they will remember that snack comes after yoga. It is VERY important to follow the routine and not try to make this class exciting and different each time.

The second most important thing to remember is that having unstructured play where the kids get to make choices about what they do and for how long they do it is what is developmentally appropriate at this age. There is enough structured time in the class. Kids should not be making an adult direct art project or doing pretty much anything which requires following directions. They should be doing things such as building with blocks, drawing or coloring their own pictures, cutting and pasting what they want to cut and paste.

Last, understand that very young children are always watching adults. If we put away cushions, mindfully using both hands and placing gently in a stack, they will notice. If we throw them in a pile or kick them to the side, they will notice. In this class, adults are modeling for kids how to do simple things with great attention

Routine

9:00-9:15: Arrival, We usually have one or two quiet, simple activities out for kids during this time.

1. Coloring: It is good to have plain paper and good quality crayons and markers out. Markers should be tested and replaced if the ink is running out. Mandala coloring pages are excellent to have out as they encourage parents to sit with their children and color.

2. Books that parents can read to children while they are waiting

9:15-9:40

Music Time: Songs should be simple and repeated week after week with little variation. By the end of the year, kids should know the words.

Welcome Song/ Greeting:

Options

“ (Wave, clap, hop, dance, or jump) hello to (child’s name)

(Wave, clap, hop, dance, or jump) hello to (child’s name)

(Wave, clap, hop, dance, or jump) hello to (child’s name)

We say hello to you.”

“2,4,6,8, Who do we appreciate? DeShaun, DeShaun, Yay DeShaun!”

Open Altar:

We invite a child to light the electric candle on the altar and a different child to ring a bell.. When they ring the bell, everyone needs to be completely quiet until the bell has completely stopped making a sound.

We try to use this time to encourage parents and kids to share and label a wide variety of feelings. For example

I feel excited because I'm going to have ice cream.

I feel happy because we have a new pet.

I feel hurt because I fell yesterday.

I feel worried because my grandma is in the hospital.

I feel jealous because I want a princess dress and my friend has one.

I feel sick because I am coughing.

I feel sad because my cat died.

I feel mad because my baby brother broke my toy.

Yoga:

We have been using “Yoga Pretzels” a set of cards by Baron Baptiste. They are divided into different types of poses e.g. “twist & stretch” or “balance.” This is a good opportunity to let kids make choices. We set out some of the Balance poses and let a child pick which one we are going to do that day for example.

9:40-10:05 Meal Blessing/Snack/Discussion time

We say the blessing that is used at Clouds in Water's Community Events:

Earth, Water, Air, and Fire combined to make this meal.

Numberless beings have died and labored so we may eat.

May we be nourished, that we may nourish life.

If space permits, kids may line up to wash hands.

Teach:

One teacher should model washing hands mindfully. Show them how to use only one squirt of soap and one paper towel to not be wasteful. Teach them to notice how the water feels on their hands and what the soap looks like when you rub your hands together.

Snack:

At least one calm adult should sit with the kids while having a snack. They should only get up to play when they are done eating. When all kids are done, the snack should be put away. Water can remain available. We want kids to practice having all of their attention on whatever it is that they are doing during this class. That is what zen is. :) E.g. When, they are eating, they should just eat. When they are playing, they should just play. When they are listening to a story, they should just listen.

Parent Discussion/ Kids' Playtime

4-5 different types of play materials should be available for kids. They should not include small parts or other choking hazards.

Examples

Paper, glue, scissors, markers, coloring sheets

Legos (the large kind, for toddlers)

Non toxic playdough

Stuffed animals

books

The kids most likely will find a favorite thing to do and do it each time. That is completely appropriate. Do not feel like you need to encourage them to do something new if they are happy. They look forward to and feel safe with routine.

During this time, parents will have a discussion. The discussion will either be led by one of the teachers or a visiting priest. This is a change this year. Many priests have signed up to talk to parents during this time. We hope this will lead to a greater connection between Zen Family practice and the greater Clouds community.

10:00 Five Minute Warning Give kids a five minute warning that playtime will soon be over. THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT. Transitions can be very hard on young children.

Clean up: This is a time for kids and parents to practice cleaning up toys mindfully. Teach them to treat each object like it is Buddha (because it is) and gently place it away.

10:05-10:15 Story Read kids a simple story. This activity is in part to introduce the parents to stories they might find helpful to have at home. Young kids do better hearing stories many times. We may want to consider having a lending library with children's stories that parents can check out.

Meditation: Our favorite meditation is passing the bell around and letting each child have a chance to "Invite the Bell."

Closing

We close by dedicating the merit. This is another verse our sangha recites frequently and children and parents will feel more of a part of the community when they go to other events if they know the words.

May the merit of this penetrate
Into each and every thing and all places.
So that we and the world together
May realize the Buddha way.

Clean up

Again, show children and parents how to mindfully stack the cushions, etc.