

*Message from the
Director of Religious
Exploration,
Tracy Breneman*



Offering positive and supportive community for youth is essential. Youth today face scrutiny and pressure in person and on social media. We are a community in which young people can celebrate their uniqueness in a safe and caring environment, explore issues important to them and engage in social justice work. We also support the adults in their lives, recognizing that they are youth's primary spiritual guides. We welcome you!

**UU Principles
Children's Version**

We believe:

- Each and every person is important
- All people should be treated fairly and kindly
- We should accept one another and learn together
- Each person must be free to search for what is true and right in life
- All persons should have a vote on things that concern them
- In working for a peaceful, fair and free world
- In caring for our planet earth, the home we share with all living things

Program Facilitators

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**More information at
[www.uufellowship.org/
middle-school-youth](http://www.uufellowship.org/middle-school-youth)**

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Special Programs for 6th – 9th Grade Youth and Parents

at the Unitarian Universalist
Fellowship of Northern
Westchester

Welcome!



Religious Exploration

Early adolescence is a special time for youth and parents. The youth's social circles are expanding and the way they perceive the world is evolving. They are exploring their own core values in relation to family, peers, relationships and community. This can be a confusing time as youth are balancing the urge for independence with the ongoing need for gentle guidance. Parenting styles and approaches are also evolving to welcome and celebrate each new stage. Both parents and youth can benefit from the support of a caring community that affirms the individual search for meaning and is welcoming to all, which is what we offer in this faith community.

Support for Parents of 7th – 9th Grade Youth

Parents and Caregivers as Sexuality Educators

As parents and caregivers, you are your youth's primary guides throughout the week, playing a central role in their emotional and spiritual development. October 2017 through April 2018, we are delighted to offer six companion *Our Whole Lives* classes for parents and caregivers where you can think intentionally about your interactions with your youth around relationships and sexuality. These classes offer information and discussion around physiological aspects of sexual development, communicating about healthy relationships, understanding sexual orientation and gender identity, peer pressure, partner pressure, consent and managing social media. By supporting youth through communication and genuine interest in their thoughts, feelings and decision-making processes, parents and caregivers can have the most positive influence on your youth's developing decision-making capacity.

We welcome parents into the class even if you do not have a youth participating. The class schedule is posted on our website at <http://www.uufellowship.org/middle-school-youth>

Betwixt and Between Book Group

Youth in 6th – 8th grade are invited into the monthly book group, *Betwixed and Between*, where they will explore the interdependent web of life and environmental justice through fiction and graphic novels. Discussion dates are listed on our website and the list of books will be updated as the group chooses new titles.

We alternate years offering OWL and COA for 7th to 9th graders. 2017 – 2018 is an OWL year.

Our Whole Lives (OWL) Sexuality and Faith

We believe that the mind, body and spirit are not separate entities but together contribute to our health as human beings. One of the goals of this faith community is to provide a safe, caring atmosphere to explore life's most intimate issues. During this year-long class, youth will explore how to make individual decisions that are healthy for them, resist peer pressure, and express themselves more clearly. These skills are essential not only when it comes to sexuality but in all the challenges that they may encounter as they come of age. We cannot expect youth to be able to "just say no" or understand why "yes means yes" is significant as affirmative consent without support from caring adults and peers.

From a young age, children are exposed to sexual images and language through television, movies, computers, magazines, music, and video games. These images frequently portray unrealistic and sometimes dangerous messages about body image, gender roles, and promiscuity. Adults often give clues that they are uncomfortable talking openly about sex and so youth may turn to unreliable sources like the Internet, magazines or one another. With peer pressure and strong messages glorifying sex in mainstream culture, youth need to understand all aspects of human sexuality and learn effective communication skills to maintain self-respect and healthy relationships.

In addition, *Our Whole Lives* provides crucial affirmation for youth of all sexual orientations, gender identities and stages of questioning. The Unitarian Universalist faith community welcomes and celebrates the many ways people love and self-identify. Affirmation and supportive community can be life saving for youth.

We are proud to offer this curriculum for 7th – 9th grade youth and sessions (described in the left column) where parents can explore issues facing your teen while feeling supported in community.

Coming of Age (COA)

Next year, during the Coming of Age class, we will explore not only what it means to be Unitarian Universalist (UU), but what it means to be **you**. Over the course of a year, youth gather for fun workshops, retreats, and social action projects. With mentors and guides, youth explore what they believe, where they find meaning, and how to build a spiritual "toolkit" to help them as they face the joys, sorrows, wonders, and challenges of being human. Youth share a personal and unique statement of belief after significant reflection. Our Coming of Age year culminates with a trip to Boston to visit sites important to our Unitarian and Universalist heritage.