

## The Family Mandala Model

A successful Family Mandala is one in which young people, from newborns to young adults, are not only welcomed and encouraged to participate as members of the community, but are also given the opportunities they need to form their own heart connections with the three jewels, and explore everything Shambhala has to offer. It is a sangha where senior students mentor young adults, young adults mentor teenagers, teenagers mentor children, and children receive the proper nurturing, training, and encouragement to become mentors one day themselves. This was the Vidyadhara's vision and something we as Shambhalian have been working on for many, many years.

Finally it seems we are becoming able to successfully manifest in this way. This means ensuring that centers have something available for all age groups and that the needs of the sangha parents who care for our children are also recognized and supported. Below are brief summaries of programs which have been developing over the years and through trial and error, proved to be successful. These programs can be tailored to meet the specific needs of individual centers and communities. Larger communities may already have some of these programs in place. Smaller communities have had great success using the Tiger Club model, and if there are older children they are trained as mentors and eventually teachers who the younger children can depend on and eventually emulate.

### 0 to 5 years Tiger Club

Tiger Club is a group supporting families with young children by allowing a consistent space for parents to practice, and establishing and building a practice community for these families. Parents and children sit in a circle together to sing a Shambhala song and meditate for one minute. Then parents have a 45 min. meditation session followed by a 30 min. parenting as path discussion while children are being looked after. Parents can take turns watching the children or collect money to pay for a qualified childcare provider (preferably a sangha teen or young adult) who does dharma arts and crafts with the children. Following discussion, parents resume sitting, and for the last 5 or 10 minutes, the children are invited to sit with them. This model is also particularly good for centers with only few children as it can really be for any age range.

### 5 to 14 years Bodhi School

Although originally intended for sangha children, Bodhi School often attracts just as many non-sangha children, and is a wonderful gateway into the community for both children and their parents. Children are introduced to sitting meditation and meditative arts as ways to work with their hearts and minds, as well as the notion of basic goodness as a way to instill confidence, bravery, and compassion. All while having fun and developing connections with other sangha children. Classes for 5 to 7 year-olds, 8 to 11 year-olds, and 12 to 14 year-olds meet once a month.

### 8 Year old Rites of Passage

A secular ritual, acknowledging the eight-year-old child's first major step towards adulthood, the first assumptions of responsibility in the family and beyond. In the intensive one-week course, the child is introduced to his or her potential as a warrior--one who faces the events of life, big and small, with an open heart, inquisitiveness, dignity, and fearlessness. Children discover these qualities through stories and discussions with the core teacher as well as meditation and mindfulness practices; working with meditative art forms such as ikebana flower arranging, calligraphy, and spontaneous poetry; and physical disciplines such as marching drill, kyudo (contemplative archery), and serving one another. The week culminates in a ceremony based on the three stages of traditional rites of passage: the symbolic separation of the children from their familiar society (home and parents), a transition period of receiving sacred teachings, and re-emergence of the children in a changed form.

### 10 to 17 Sun Camp and Cadet Command Workshop

A two week mountain meditation and drill camp program, Sun Camp is the perfect model for the Family Mandala Model because each child has a very definite role to play, with the older ones caring for the younger ones and with leadership training for all.

### 14 to 16 Dharmic Warriors

Dharmic Warriors is a 2 year program for teenagers who are interested in Shambhala Buddhism and meditation. The group is lead by a young person and meets weekly for a short meditation period followed by a class taught by a senior teacher and a discussion. This is an opportunity for teenagers to make their first connection to Shambhala, or in the case of Dharma Brats, to make their own connection independent of their parents. There is a strong emphasis on sangha

and connecting with one another as heart-friends, so the social aspect is emphasized just as much as the practice and study aspects. The group chooses the classes based on what they are interested in and what is relevant to their lives at that time- they alternate between Shambhala Art, Buddhist Studies and Shambhala Culture, as well as doing one teen Shambhala Training level every other month.

#### 14 to 18 Explorers of the Richness of the Phenomenal World

Karme Choling has been offering this exemplary outward bound style week long program for the past couple of years and it is very popular with teenagers.

#### 18 to Young Adult

Many centers including Boulder, Boston and NY, have found that programs for 18-30 year olds are very popular and act as a gateway for younger people into the sangha.

There have been many versions of this, and really it depends on the desires of your young sangha. The basic structure is to meet once a week for 20 min to 1 hour of meditation followed by either a short talk by a member of the group, a reading and discussion, or just a time to socialize together. Usually this group also organizes their own social gatherings, cocktail parties, and weekend retreats.

#### Parent Support

Parenting as Path Discussion Group - Meets once or twice per month for open discussion of such issues as 'how to discipline without aggression' and 'how to maintain private meditation time'. Parenting as Path talks are also offered by senior students to parents while their children are at Bodhi School. In both situations childcare is provided.