

Tips for Sharing a Full Godly Play Session on Zoom

A Document in Development as we continue to learn how to Godly Play in this new way.

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Purpose:

In this period of social distancing due to Covid-19, we are exploring the best practice to continue to meet with our Godly Play circles online in this time and this place. We recognise that this will need to be “good enough” Godly Play, but we also recognise the need to continue relationship and support for our circles through this pandemic. Our goal is to keep to Godly Play principles and always work to be in service to our circles, even in this new way of sharing Godly Play. The tips shared in this document come from experiences of sharing Zoom sessions, but please adapt this to work in your situation and for what is best with your circle.

Through Zoom, we are all guests in each other’s spaces. The circle is not being welcomed into a Godly Play space, but instead we are all equal, welcoming everyone in the circle into all of our spaces. We wonder how our shared spaces can be transformed into sacred space in this time. Perhaps in reflecting on the theological work of Dr. Rebecca Nye, we will receive some direction through thinking through her acronym SPIRIT (Space, Process, Imagination, Relationship, Intimacy and Trust). As we reflect on how we can meet each of these elements through story and play within our zoom sessions, we may find that shared sacred space together. This big work of considering Godly Play online also relies heavily on reviewing again the processes and principles of Godly Play set by the work of Jerome Berryman.

When my circle met online for the first time, I wondered how this would work as Godly Play. However, the need for maintaining relationship was evident in requests for Godly Play from parents. The joy to see each other’s faces and connect was hugely important. I realised as the session began, that if all we managed that day was to Build Our Circle, then we would have had an excellent Godly Play session. As we move forward with Zoom sessions, let’s keep the focus on childhood spirituality and relationship at the heart of this big work.

Setting Up:

Ahead of the Zoom Godly Play Session -

Set up your Zoom Account via the website (www.zoom.us) - (for tips on how to do this – please see the “Things to Consider to Safeguard Using Zoom for Godly Play” document also available from Godly Play UK and Godly Play Scotland)

Set your Zoom meeting.

Download the Zoom app to your recording device – phone or tablet.

Prepare a document explaining the different parts to a Godly Play Session for any parents who have not yet experienced one. With Godly Play at home, we need to encourage parents to act as Door People, ready to help their children have what they need to respond: to dig out any paper, pens, crayons, art materials, books, construction materials, soft toys or other possible response materials they have around the house to have at the ready. Let them know to have a snack or lunch ready for the close of the session for their family to enjoy at the feast. Email this document out with the zoom invite log in details to your circle of participants a couple days in advance of the call.

Also invite your doorperson to be part of the call. This helps for safeguarding to ensure you always have two adults present in the Godly Play Zoom space. For child protection, an adult would not be alone in a church setting with children, so this same principle should be applied to virtual children's ministry.

On the day of your Zoom Godly Play Session:

I wonder how you can help keep the focus on the story.

Perhaps clear a space in your home with a neutral background behind you.

Check your clothing – does it cover you properly when you bend over? Do you have any dangling jewellery or clothing that you need to remove or rethink wearing in case it distracts from the story?

How is the lighting?

Is there background noise you need to minimise?

Do you have a pet who might want to join the story? I wonder if you can help them find a safe place to play or rest in another room while you film?

Have you got the camera angle set up on your circle?

I wonder if you are ready to welcome your circle.

Have you got everything you need for your story?

Are you logged in and ready to host your zoom call? Have you got your co-host (doorperson) set up to manage the zoom call for you while you are storytelling?

If you have children in your home who will be part of the circle, have they found a safe, comfortable space to sit in the room with you? Perhaps they will be most comfortable off camera. This is also possibly a good thing to help keep equality in the circle as the other children in the circle aren't able to sit so close to the materials. *My children like to build a nest of blankets and cosy up on the nearby couch to watch the story and wonder.*

Get ready – whatever this is for you in a normal Godly Play Session, do this also for a Zoom Godly Play Session. *For me, this is breathing deep, sitting comfortably, saying a prayer and then I'm ready.*

Full Session:

Threshold – Participants will be in the waiting room until you let them into the zoom call (or your doorman/co-host lets them in). The waiting room is a feature on zoom which is automatically enabled with a recent zoom update (5 April 2020). As participants log into the call, they are placed the waiting room. As the host, drop down the participant list from the **participants** button. You can **admit all** by clicking on that button at the top of the column or you can click on the **admit** button next to each participant's name in the participant's drop down list as they log into the call. As the participant's video and audio is connected, you can pause to say hello and welcome to each family.

Welcome/Building the Circle - After you have a couple participants there, you may want to begin with a check-in to build your circle. For instance:

“I wonder what the highlight of your week has been.”

“I wonder where you saw God in your week.”

“I wonder if you are comfortable and ready in your space. I wonder what you have brought to the zoom to help you be ready for a story.”

If you have a large circle of participants, you may find it is helpful if each participant is on mute for this and only the person speaking is un-muted. You can say, “I wonder if we will all mute ourselves while we listen to each person. Would Alex like to un-mute and share first,” and then continue on with each participant until all have had the opportunity to share.

In your first zoom, it may be helpful to check that each participant knows how to use the mute/un-mute function and that they know how to switch from speaker view to gallery view. This will help enable your circle to manage their zoom Godly Play experience for themselves. Learning how to switch to speaker view will also enable your circle to bring the story picture larger on their screen at home when you begin telling the story.

Once you have built the circle, let everyone know it is time for each of us to get ready in our spaces.

At this point, my camera person takes our iPad and I move over to where the floor is clear for me to sit.

Remember to keep the relationship with your participants. Look to the camera as that is where your circle is. Take a pause and ask something like, “Are we ready to get today's story?”

Bring your story to the floor space. At this point focus the camera screen onto the story – only showing your hands and the materials.

To keep focus on the story, participants in your circle may want to mute themselves so that noises in other spaces don't take the speaker view away from the story. *As my zoom Godly Play includes parents at this time, my camera person often mutes the participants during the story and un-mutes them when it is time to*

wonder as some “helpful” parents like to contribute to the story which can also be distracting to the circle.

Story – Share the story as you would if the group was with you in the room.

For the right camera angle, you may need to place the story materials on a table. Work with the space you have as your circle is not sitting on the ground with you so you can bring the materials to a table if needed.

If it is a parable, then you still leave time for people to wonder about the materials at the start. Whenever you are wondering, have the camera screen come up to include your face too as you look at your circle (the camera). Encourage participants to un-mute themselves as they wonder. When you go into telling the parable, refocus the camera angle onto the materials.

Wondering – Change the camera angle to include your face as you begin to wonder.

My camera person gives me the iPad at this time so that I can see everyone’s faces and know who is talking. I ask the first wondering question as I physically move myself to the other side of the story so that when I swap the camera view to in front of the screen, then it is on the materials from the circle’s perspective, rather than the storyteller’s perspective.

As the circle wonders, I use one hand to hold the iPad and the other to move the story materials to reflect the wondering. When I ask the next wondering question, I switch the camera view to face me and not the materials and then swap back to the story after the question is asked so that participants can look at the story while wondering.

There will be other ways to do this with a tripod or a laptop – adapt it to your set up.

If your story included physical wondering, then you may ask your circle to find something in their home to bring to the story. This can be very playful as Judy Yeomans explained: *“We’ve had some really playful moments as children have ‘handed’ me things to look at or put next to one of the Faces of Easter. Yesterday we had two children and a cat brought to the story so I had to move to make room for them, which made everyone laugh.”*

If children are bringing things to the wondering and they choose to share it with the group, you may need to help them the first time to see where to hold the item for it be visible to the camera.

Response Time – As the wondering comes to a close, I move back to my storyteller cushion with the camera screen on me as I’m explaining ways families might like to respond to today’s story.

As participants are at home, invite your circle to use their imagination to respond in new ways with whatever they can find around them. This is a playful time and their response can continue for as long as they need at home.

Offer options, I say something like: “You might like to create something with art materials, crayons, pens, paper or other things in your home; play with play doh or blow bubbles; find this story in a book or Bible or read other books; sit outside in your back garden or somewhere in your house in silence; wonder more with your parents or siblings about the story; tell this story for yourself using household objects or toys around you. I don’t know what you need to do today to respond, only you know. While you are thinking about how you might like to respond, I’ll put away our story for today.”

Position the camera screen on you and the story as you put away the story and place the story materials back to your side.

Look to the camera and let your circle know what time they may want to return to the zoom for the feast. *This can be optional – perhaps participants want to continue responding to the story uninterrupted for longer or perhaps they will want to pause their response, share the feast with you and then go back to their response. There is more flexibility at home as we currently have all the time we need in our homes.*

Families are invited to stay logged into the meeting and mute or unmute themselves as they respond or they can leave the zoom meeting and re-join it at the designated time. During the response time, I am muted and sitting in the circle as I would in the Godly Play room, sometimes looking at a book or working with a wooden labyrinth we have at home (just so families don’t feel as though I’m watching them respond and they have that safe space at home to respond).

If a family would like to speak with me, then I un-mute myself and chat. I often have one particular child who says, “I’m not going to mute myself, I’m just going to sit here and talk to you.” This is how he needs to respond right now, so I’m available for that. *(His mother is always in the room with him while he speaks with me and my camera person is also in the room with me for safeguarding reasons – always have two adults present – even in a zoom meeting).*

Feast – At the designated time, un-mute yourself and say to those on the call something like, “There will be more time to continue our response at home. You have all the time you need to do this in your home. For now, I wonder if we will pause our response, and come back to the circle to share our feast together.”

Once most, if not all of the participants, are back on the zoom call, I say a prayer and then welcome everyone to enjoy their feast. *You may wish to open up the prayer for others to say as well. Do what is best for your circle.*

As we feast, we sometimes take turns speaking to share something we’re looking forward to later that day or in the coming week. Most weeks everyone returns to the zoom meeting in time for the prayer at the start of the feast, however sometimes families get caught up at home and return mid-feast. Just be flexible with this and welcome those participants when they do re-join you.

Blessing – As we reach the full hour together, I thank the full group for joining us in the circle today.

I read out the Godly Play Blessing for the group, if they know it – they say it with me. *(If you don't know it, then contact a Godly Play UK trainer and they will share it with you).*

As we are in each other's spaces, the full circle should have the opportunity to say goodbye to each other. Perhaps have a group goodbye.

I like to also say goodbye to each family – naming each family member who joined us that morning. Names are so important in Godly Play.

Participants wave goodbye as they exit the meeting.

I end the meeting once everyone has exited the meeting themselves. Sometimes a family stays on the zoom call a bit longer, just smiling or wanting to say something else. I give them the space to exit the call when they are ready, especially as right now, that little bit extra time of pastoral care is needed for all of us.

After the Zoom Godly Play Session:

End the Zoom Meeting.

Breathe, take some time to sit in silence to reflect on the session. Take some notes – perhaps keep a Godly Play Diary for this season of online Godly Playing. It will help you keep track of your learning as you think through how to better support your circle in these strange times.

Tidy away your Godly Play supplies, recording supplies and re-set your living space. I find this is important as my home Godly Play space is in our living room and to have that space, I need to clear away my children's toys and personal belongings. It is important for this space that is borrowed for Godly Play, once more belong to my children. I clear and reset their belongings where they were before our session. This space is sacred for them too!

As my Godly Play circle includes my two young children, I take this time to either help them continue their response time or sit with them as I've inevitably spent more time focusing on the rest of the circle and not been able to give them enough space to interact with me or their father (my camera person). I then focus on what they and my husband need.

Later in the day, I try to find some space on my own to do what I need to rest as I find as an introvert that being on camera and interacting via Zoom is just as exhausting as physically being present in a Godly Play circle. You need time afterwards for your well-being too. Take care of yourself so that you are able to look after others in your home and circle.

Share any new learnings from this session with your fellow storytellers via Godly Play UK, Godly Play Scotland, or Knowing Godly Play in a New Way Facebook groups. We're all on this uncharted journey of supporting our circles online. We can all learn from each other.

Further Reflection:

In the time between our Godly Play circles online, perhaps this time at home provides more space for us to revisit the theology behind the big work we are doing through Godly Play. This may be a good time to read or re-read these books:

Teaching Godly Play: How to Mentor the Spiritual Development of Children, Jerome W. Berryman (2009), Morehouse Education Resources, Denver.

Children's Spirituality: What it is and Why it Matters, Rebecca Nye (2009), Church House Publishing, London.