

Ananda Pune's New Biweekly Children's and Parents' Programmes by Prisha Kirby



"Could we have an ongoing children's programme?", urged several Ananda Pune parents back in February.

In response, community children now gather every other Sunday at the City Centre for an inspirational as well as fun hour and a half of nature, art, and crafts activities; games; stories; "meditation lite"; yoga poses; affirmations; and Ananda children's songs.

In the top picture to the left, you see a recent session with the children. Proud grandparents watch from the sidelines. The bottom picture shows the children playing a "Sharing Nature" game outside.



Our new initiative has deep roots in Ananda's acclaimed Education for Life (EFL) philosophy and practices, developed by Swami Kriyananda along the lines of Yoganandaji's own approach to children's education prior to his departure from India.

Other holistic and experiential resources developed by innovative Ananda members are also used, such as *I Came from Joy!*, a series of activities for children's spiritual education and exploration, and the multiawarded *Sharing Nature* publications.

Leading the children's programme are enthusiastic young Ananda educators Gaurja Prashar, a certified EFL teacher, and Namita Raghav, an EFL India outreach associate.



While the children meet downstairs at the Centre, the parents meet upstairs with me to discuss ways that EFL can be applied toward successful parenting, especially in their own families. We make use of the same resources as in the children's programme along with others developed by EFL educators for fostering universal life values — as well as other materials developed by Gayatri Nambiar and me, co-directors of EFL India, in our long collaboration in Indian parent and teacher training.

These pictures are from a recent parents' gathering at which EFL's new Life Skill Action Charts were introduced. They won great interest and immediate application at home, judging by comments on our Ananda Parents WhatsApp group. Soon we'll be able to have threaded discussions online at our EFL India Web site.

All Ananda children and parents are welcome to join these programmes at any time. To do so, please contact Gaurja for the children's programme (gaurja@anandaindia.org) or me for the parents' programme (pkirby@anandaindia.org).



Sunday School at the Centre

(A reflection on the children's programme by one of its directors)

by Namita Raghav

The month of April brought some good news for parents looking for a direction, guidance and support to address the different needs of their children in different age groups ... and the news extends to those children who have been looking forward to making their Sundays all the more meaningful, joyful, and exciting.

The news is the advent of Sunday school at the Centre!!!

Sunday School began on 4 March and is conducted every alternate Sunday, i.e., twice a month.

The purpose is to provide a support system to the parents of children in different age groups and



sowing seeds of spirituality in children by simple, playful activities by applying Education for Life (EFL) principles. EFL is a system of education with the mission of providing children with a balanced education of body, feelings, will, and intellect in preparation for using life's diverse challenges to discover ever-deeper levels of purpose, meaning, and happiness.

Apart from receiving formal education at schools, our children are also entitled to learn the higher spiritual principles that, if practised sincerely and consciously, can shape their lives in the most beautiful ways.

The children's group is led by Gaurja, a certified EFL teacher, and myself, Namita, serving on the EFL India staff. At the same time as the children meet, a parents' group is led by Prisha, co-director of Education for Life India.

In the children's group, we aim at making them learn certain yoga postures coupled with affirmations to develop in them the ability to stay calm and centred in themselves, followed by a little meditation to improve their concentration and in turn help them in their studies and other activities. We also make the children repeat affirmations that will gradually sow seeds of various virtues in them, such as kindness, compassion, friendship, and love. An affirmation is a statement of truth that can have a great impact on our consciousness if said with concentration and energy.

Then we have different games and activities, both indoor and outdoor, for the children depending on their age group. These games and activities are designed in a manner that helps bring out the best in the children, expose their latent talents, and enhance team spirit and harmony. Lastly, we have various home assignments to be practised during the days till our next meeting. These assignments keep them in tune with whatever they learn in the Sunday School.

Sunday School is an impactful space to keep both parents and children in touch with the awareness of inner growth, to share the best practices of teaching and parenting, to strengthen the bonding between parent-parent, parent-child and child-child and ultimately to enhance the level of joy in everything we do.