**Guidance on Children's Classes**Conversations: Describing the Children's Class Program

August 20-21 2016



**Spiritual Education**

They [children] must be constantly encouraged and made eager to gain all the summits of human accomplishment, so that from their earliest years they will be taught to have high aims, to conduct themselves well, to be chaste, pure, and undefiled, and will learn to be of powerful resolve and firm of purpose in all things. Let them not jest and trifle, but earnestly advance unto their goals, so that in every situation they will be found resolute and firm.

—'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. [135](http://bahai-library.com/writings/abdulbaha/swab/swaball.html#135)

As to thy question regarding the education of children: it behoveth thee to nurture them at the breast of the love of God, and urge them onward to the things of the spirit, that they may turn their faces unto God; that their ways may conform to the rules of good conduct and their character be second to none; that they make their own all the graces and praiseworthy qualities of humankind; acquire a sound knowledge of the various branches of learning, so that from the very beginning of life they may become spiritual beings, dwellers in the Kingdom, enamoured of the sweet breaths of holiness, and may receive an education religious, spiritual, and of the Heavenly Realm. Verily will I call upon God to grant them a happy outcome in this.

—'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. [142](http://bahai-library.com/writings/abdulbaha/swab/swaball.html#142)

They must favour character and conduct above the sciences and arts. Good behaviour and high moral character must come first, for unless the character be trained, acquiring knowledge will only prove injurious. Knowledge is praiseworthy when it is coupled with ethical conduct and virtuous character; otherwise it is a deadly poison, a frightful danger.

—'Abdu'l-Bahá, in *Bahá'í Education*, p. 29, no. [74](http://bahai-library.com/compilation_bahai_education#71)

Training in Morals and Good Conduct is Far More Important Than Book Learning

"Training in morals and good conduct is far more important than book learning. A child that is cleanly, agreeable, of good character, well-behaved—even though he be ignorant—is preferable to a child that is rude, unwashed, ill-natured, and yet becoming deeply versed in all the sciences and arts. The reason for this is that the child who conducts himself well, even though he be ignorant, is of benefit to others, while an ill-natured, ill-behaved child is corrupted and harmful to others, even though he be learned. If, however, the child be trained to be both learned and good, the result is light upon light."
(‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, pp. 135-136)

If a plant is carefully nurtured by a gardener, it will become good, and produce better fruit. These children must be given a good training from their earliest childhood. They must be given a systematic training which will further their development from day to day, in order that they may receive greater insight, so that their spiritual receptivity be broadened. Beginning in childhood they must receive instruction. They cannot be taught through books. Many elementary sciences must be made clear to them in the nursery; they must learn them in play, in amusement. Most ideas must be taught them through speech, not by book learning. One child must question the other concerning these things, and the other child must give the answer. In this way, they will make great progress. For example, mathematical problems must also be taught in the form of questions and answers. One of the children asks a question and the other must give the answer. Later on, the children will of their own accord speak with each other concerning these same subjects. The children who are at the head of the class must receive premiums. They must be encouraged and when any one of them shows good advancement, for the further development they must be praised and encouraged therein. Even so in Godlike affairs. Oral questions must be asked and the answers must be given orally. They must discuss with each other in this manner.
(The Bahá’í World, Vol. 9 (1940-1944), p. 543)

The children who are trained in the world-embracing teachings of Bahá’u’lláh cannot but grow up to be a truly new race of men. He hopes these young people will prepare themselves for the great task which will face them in the future, that of helping to rebuild the world with the aid and inspiration of the Bahá’í teachings.
(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, To the Bahá’ís of Hobart, Australia, 25 December 1941)

The subjects to be taught in children's school are many, and for lack of time We can touch on only a few: First and most important is training in behaviour and good character; the rectification of qualities; arousing the desire to become accomplished and acquire perfections, and to cleave unto the religion of God and stand firm in His Laws: to accord total obedience to every just government, to show forth loyalty and trustworthiness to the ruler of the time, to be well wishers of mankind, to be kind to all.

And further, as well as in the ideals of character, instruction in such arts and sciences as are of benefit, and in foreign tongues. Also, the repeating of prayers for the well-being of ruler and ruled; and the avoidance of materialistic works that are current among those who see only natural causation, and tales of love, and books that arouse the passions.

To sum up, let all the lessons be entirely devoted to the acquisition of human perfections.

Here, then, in brief are directions for the curriculum of these schools.
(From a Tablet, translated from the Persian)

<http://www.bahai.org/beliefs/universal-peace/articles-resources/universal-education-quotes>

**For more quotes & references:**

Bahai-library.com/nsa\_foundations\_spiritual\_education

Some Answered Questions p. 8-9 on different types of education

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha Sec 99 p. 127. And section 100 pp 127.  On need for divined education to combat moral degeneration And section 103. Pp 129-131

Sources for spiritual education:
• book 3 grade 1 unit 2 section 1 page 1
• book 3 grade 2 unit 1 section 2 page 2-3

**Elements of the Program**

These are simple classes which any interested person can teach every week to small groups of children in a Baha’i community. In these classes, the children memorize prayers and quotations from the Writings, listen to stories and simple explanations of the teachings, and sing and play.
**Children’s Classes Grade 1: Some Principles of Baha’i Education, p. 1**

"Much like those in Grade 1, each lesson consists essentially of five parts: memorization of prayers and quotations, songs, stories, drama, and drawing. "
**Teaching Children's Classes Grade 2, page before page 1**
"Each lesson is structured in a manner similar to those in Grade 2--memorization of prayers and quotations, songs, stories, drama, and drawing--although some elements increase in complexity, demanding greater capacity on the part of teachers."
**Teaching Children's Classes, Grade 3, p. Before page 1**

Baha’i children’s classes aim to nurture the hearts and minds of children. The emphasis of these classes is on helping children to learn to reflect on and apply spiritual principles, such as love, unity and justice, to their own lives and to the lives of those around them. Based on the teachings of Baha’u’llah, the classes seek to inspire in children a love of God and His Messengers, and of humanity in all its diversity. The classes include short lessons, activities to build friendship, games, stories, art and music. (<http://www.building-community.ca/childrens-classes>)

In recent years, [training institutes](http://www.bahai.org/action/response-call-bahaullah/training-institute) around the world have been playing an increasingly important part in the training of teachers to conduct classes for the spiritual education of children. The [materials](http://www.bahai.org/action/response-call-bahaullah/training-institute-presentation) being developed for use by the institutes emphasise the acquisition of [spiritual qualities](http://www.bahai.org/beliefs/life-spirit/character-conduct/)—for example, truthfulness, generosity, purity of heart, and kindness, to name a few—which are considered attributes of God that are reflected in the mirror of the human heart. Year after year, the materials build on the understanding of these qualities and add lessons related to the [history](http://www.bahai.org/beliefs/bahaullah-covenant/) and [the Writings of the Bahá’í Faith](http://www.bahai.org/library/). The goal is for the children to reach a stage in which they can understand and act upon the imperative to tend to their own spiritual development and contribute to the well-being of society.

(http://www.bahai.org/action/family-life-children/childrens-classes)

**Nobility of Man**

"Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom."  - Baha'u'llah
Book 3 Unit 1 Section 3

No child is incorrigible. All can be good and all can develop spiritual qualities.
Book 3 Unit 1 Section 2

Students possess hidden gems which you will help them discover. You are going to converse with them, listen to their opinions, and see to it that Baha'u'llah’s teachings develop in them the capacities God has bestowed upon them.

Book 3 Unit 1 Section 5

You as a teacher have to search for your students talents and foster their development...discover their capacities.

Book 3 Unit 1 Section 6

"As to thy question regarding the education of children: it behoveth thee to nurture them at the breast of the love of God, and urge them onward to the things of the spirit, that they may turn their faces unto God; that their ways may conform to the rules of good conduct and their character be second to none; that they make their own all the graces and praiseworthy qualities of humankind; acquire a sound knowledge of the various branches of learning, so that from the very beginning of life they may become spiritual beings, dwellers in the Kingdom, enamoured of the sweet breaths of holiness, and may receive an education religious, spiritual, and of the Heavenly Realm. Verily will I call upon God to grant them a happy outcome in this." - 'Abdu'l-Baha

Book 3 Unit 1 Section 7

Children are the most precious treasure a community can possess, for in them are the promise and guarantee of the future.  They bear the seeds of the character of future society which is largely shaped by what the adults constituting the community do or fail to do with respect to children.  They are a trust no community can neglect with impunity.  An all-embracing love of children, the manner of treating them, the quality of the attention shown them, the spirit of adult behaviour toward them--these are all among the vital aspects of the requisite attitude.  Love demands discipline, the courage to accustom children to hardship, not to indulge their whims or leave them entirely to their own devices.  An atmosphere needs to be maintained in which children feel that they belong to the community and share in its purpose.  They must lovingly but insistently be guided to live up to Bahá'í standards, to study and teach the Cause in ways that are suited to their circumstances.

Universal House of Justice, Ridvan 2000 paragraph 25

Bahá’ís see the young as the most precious treasure a community can possess. In them are the promise and guarantee of the future. Yet, in order for this promise to be realised, children need to receive spiritual nourishment. In a world where the joy and innocence of childhood can be so easily overwhelmed by the aggressive pursuit of materialistic ends, the moral and spiritual education of children assumes vital importance.

(http://www.bahai.org/action/family-life-children/childrens-classes)

**Community Building**

In its message dated 9 January 2001, however, the House of Justice refers specifically to Bahá’í children’s classes as also being open to non-Bahá’í children. In the case of these classes, which are intended to address the complete spiritual education of Bahá’ís, it would not be possible to eliminate Bahá’í religious teachings, and topics such as Bahá’í history, Bahá’í laws, and the Covenant would be an integral part of these classes.
 While Bahá’í religious teachings are part of the programme of child education in Bahá’í classes, the design of the programme, particularly the sequencing of content, may make it more attractive to non-Bahá’ís. For example, in the approach taken to child education in Ruhi Institute Book 3, the emphasis is placed initially on character development, and only later are specific aspects related to the life of Bahá’u’lláh and the Báb introduced.

...through which its inhabitants, prompted by a wish to contribute to the spiritual and material well-being of their communities, are enabled to begin offering acts of service.
December 29th, 2015. Par.  6

...Yet above all, it is a spiritual enterprise, and its true character should never be obscured. The urgency to act is impelled by the world’s desperate condition.
December 29th, 2015  par.  52

Bahá'ís and their friends, neighbors and co-workers are involved in a process that seeks to raise capacity within a population to take charge of its own spiritual, social and intellectual development. The activities that drive this process include devotional gathering, study circles, children’s class and junior youth groups:

* [**Devotional gatherings**](http://www.phillybahai.org/devotional-gatherings.html) aim to create a new spiritual atmosphere in neighborhoods, through prayer and reflection.
* [**Study circles**](http://www.phillybahai.org/study-circles.html) gather people of varied backgrounds to consider teachings from the Bahá'í Writings on the purpose of life, the nature of reality, and the significance of service. Participants seeks to put the learning acquired into practice in an effort to explore the application of spiritual teachings to their individual and collective lives. Study circles meet in homes and other informal settings.
* [**Junior youth groups**](http://www.phillybahai.org/junior-youth-groups.html) channel the surging energies of junior youth toward a twofold moral purpose -- to take charge of their own personal growth and to contribute to the transformation of society.
* [**Children's classes**](http://www.phillybahai.org/childrens-classes.html) nurture the tender hearts and minds of children through stories, games, arts and music.

**Baha'i Faith**

The Bahá’í Faith is a world religion whose purpose is to unite all the races and peoples in one universal Cause and one common Faith. Bahá’ís are the followers of Bahá’u’lláh... One of the important teachings of Bahá’u’lláh concerns the education of children. We are taught that children are the most precious treasure a community can possess, for in them are the promise and guarantee of the future. Providing classes for the moral and spiritual education of children is a service that Bahá’ís around the world happily provide for their communities.

The Bahá’i community is a steadily growing global community of people drawn from every cultural background on earth who are united by a core set of universally held spiritual beliefs and yet celebrate the infinite diversity that characterizes the secondary aspects of their lives. Within this framework of unity in diversity, Bahá’is are, in turn, engaging an ever-widening circle of friends, neighbors, and coworkers, on every continent, in an expanding range of activities intended to uplift, in an unprejudiced manner, the spiritual and material conditions of humanity as a whole. All of the endeavors of the community are thus intended to revolve around, and promote, the principle of the oneness of humanity.”31