The National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths is about more than the weekend itself. Its aim is to inspire, inform, and equip participants for new, long-term action that improves the lives of children and families and moves our nation toward greater justice, especially for children, those who are impoverished, and those who experience other injustice and oppression.

Action inspired by the Children’s Sabbath starts on the designated weekend and continues—through the engagement of individual members and through the initiatives of the places of worship—throughout the year. Please refer to the general Action Resources on CDF’s website for a broad range of actions that can make a difference every year.
The following actions are recommended specifically for the 2020 Children's Sabbath weekend in light of the urgent needs and opportunities of this particular time to promote engagement in our democracy through voter education and voting; promoting children's literature that reflects diverse experiences and encourages social action; and using masks to promote positive messages. Read on for details about the following actions:

- I Vote Because…
- Pledge to Vote
- Children's Books that Inspire
- Message Masks

I Vote Because…

Background on this 2020 Children’s Sabbath action: In 1964, courageous young people from across the country came to Mississippi intent on fighting against deeply entrenched racist systems that told the state's Black citizens they weren’t worthy of basic rights or bodily safety. Set against the recent, brutal deaths of three freedom fighters, the Mississippi Freedom Summer volunteers targeted two pillars of empowerment—education and voting rights—and set to the dangerous task of extending those to Black Mississippians.

The CDF Freedom Schools® program that CDF has operated for 25 years as of this summer was built in that model of the first freedom schools run that summer, and it is deeply rooted in the principles of intergenerational servant leadership that defined the Civil Rights Movement. These twin pillars of voting rights and education are just as vital this year, in the run-up to a crucially important election and when the rights of Black people—including voting rights—are threatened at every turn.

Black children and families are disproportionately suffering the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic crisis that it has caused. Systemic racism and white supremacy have created disparities that hold Black children back, and they are being widened and magnified daily by the pandemic.

Amidst all of that, the CDF Freedom Schools program is as important today as the freedom schools were in the summer of 1964. The CDF Freedom Schools program is led by servant leader interns who are trained to help children find a love of learning and pride in their identities, giving them the tools they need to make a difference. The program helps Black children understand that change is in their hands and shows them examples of historic change-makers, young and old.

Late civil rights giant Representative John Lewis made this point himself when he told college-aged servant leader interns at their training in 2014: "Be bold, be brave, be courageous, speak up, speak out. You must get out there and push and pull and help change things. And bring about a nonviolent revolution, a revolution of values, a revolution of ideas."

This past summer, as has been the case for 25 summers, that revolution of ideas took root in CDF Freedom Schools across the country—even if the programs looked a little different due to the pandemic. In July, K-12 CDF Freedom Schools scholars led a campaign to tell adults in their communities why their votes matter and demand that their voices be heard at the polls. To them, the connection is intrinsic: education + voting = power.
ACTION IDEAS FOR CHILDREN’S SABBATHS WEEKEND AND THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

Those children were bold, courageous, and not afraid to speak out, because they learned to harness that power at CDF Freedom Schools. Now, more than ever, we need to celebrate that. **And as we all head to the polls in November, people of faith must remember that all children deserve to be heard, to be cared for, and to know that they matter. Now, more than ever, children are observing how we respond and how we stand up for them. They are looking for our validation of their voices and efforts, and they need adults to keep them in mind when they vote in November!**

As another civil rights icon, Reverend C. T. Vivian, said to CDF Freedom Schools servant leader interns the following year, “this is the moment we’ve waited for... It's up to us to create the world we really want.”

**What Your Place of Worship Can Do on the Children's Sabbath to “Vote Because”:**

1. **Show the 3-minute video** made by Freedom School scholars this summer giving voice to why they hope adults will vote. It could be shown during the coffee hour or oneg for congregations that are gathering in person, streamed before, during, or after a virtual service, and posted on your place of worship’s website. [https://www.childrensdefense.org/commit-to-vote-for-children/](https://www.childrensdefense.org/commit-to-vote-for-children/)

2. **Invite people of all ages to make signs saying why they will vote, with the hashtag #VoteBecause.** These signs could be held up during a Zoom gathering of your congregation, mailed in or dropped off to your place of worship and posted on a wall (with a photo taken and posted on the website), or displayed in other ways appropriate to your circumstances.

3. **Ask the young people from your place of worship to make a short video,** like the video linked in item 1 above, with their voices and signs naming why they think it is important for adults to vote for children’s well-being. Arrange to show it before, during, or after your services or other activities whether you are gathering virtually or in person.

4. **Encourage members who are active on social media to post their own signs and messages of why they will vote for children and justice with the hashtags #VoteBecause and #ChildrensSabbath**

**Pledge to Vote**

CDF has partnered with When We All Vote to encourage voter registration and turn-out. Many faith traditions are also engaging in organized efforts to educate, register, and turn out voters. Of course congregations should not engage in partisan campaigning advocating for any particular candidate, but it is appropriate to encourage members to engage in the democratic process and for their faith and understanding of justice and compassion to guide their decisions.
What Your Place of Worship Can Do on the Children's Sabbath to Pledge to Vote:

1. **Encourage members to Pledge to Vote** by sharing the link from CDF's website.
2. **Share the link from CDF's website to When We All Vote.** Congregation members will be able to register themselves to vote through [When We All Vote's voter registration portal](https://www.whenweallvote.org). In addition to taking individuals through all the steps they'll need to register to vote, this service allows them to look up their primary election date, receive up-to-date information about local and national elections occurring in their state, and see state-by-state voting information. Encourage them to register through [When We All Vote](https://www.whenweallvote.org) today!
3. **Draw on the resources prepared by various faith communities.** A partial list follows:
   
   a. The United Church of Christ’s Our Faith, Our Vote [https://www.ucc.org/ourfaithourvote](https://www.ucc.org/ourfaithourvote)
   c. The Union of Reform Judaism’s Every Voice, Every Vote [https://rac.org/rac-civic-engagement-campaign-2020-1](https://rac.org/rac-civic-engagement-campaign-2020-1)
   d. The Friends Committee on National Legislation’s Voter Registration Tool Kit [https://www.fcnl.org/updates/voter-registration-toolkit-2816](https://www.fcnl.org/updates/voter-registration-toolkit-2816)
   e. The Sojourners and National African American Clergy Network’s We Are Watching Campaign [http://lawyersandcollars.org/](http://lawyersandcollars.org/)
   f. The National Council of Jewish Women’s Promote the Vote, Protect the Vote [https://www.ncjw.org/act/action-resources/voter-engagement/](https://www.ncjw.org/act/action-resources/voter-engagement/)
   g. The Poor People’s Campaign’s We Must Do M.O.R.E.—Mobilizing, Organizing, Registering, and Educating [https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/voting/](https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/voting/)
   h. Emgage’s The Million Muslim Votes Campaign [https://millionmuslimvotes.com/](https://millionmuslimvotes.com/)
   j. The Unitarian Universalist Association’s UU The Vote [https://www.uuthevote.org/](https://www.uuthevote.org/)

The **CDF Freedom Schools Program and Children’s Books that Inspire**

**Background on The CDF Freedom Schools Model and Children’s Literature:** Through the CDF Freedom Schools model, we empower youth to excel and believe in their ability to make a difference in themselves, their families, communities, country and world with hope, education and action.

Rooted in the Mississippi Freedom Summer project of 1964, the CDF Freedom Schools program has historically been and continues to be a part of the Black Community Crusade for Children®. The CDF Freedom Schools program is a six-week summer literacy and cultural enrichment program designed to serve children and youth in grades K–12 in communities where quality academic enrichment programming is limited, too expensive, or non-existent. By partnering with schools, faith and community-based organizations, municipalities, colleges and universities, and juvenile detention facilities, we are able to offer this program in these communities at no cost.
The CDF Freedom Schools program enhances children's motivation to read and makes them feel good about learning. At the same time, the program connects families to the right resources in their communities. CDF Freedom Schools students engage in a research-based, multicultural Integrated Reading Curriculum that supports them and their families through five essential components:

1. High quality academic enrichment
2. Parent and family development
3. Civic engagement and social action
4. Intergenerational servant leadership development
5. Nutrition, health and mental health

Students also receive two nutritious meals and a snack daily, as well as a book each week to build their home libraries.

We believe in an intergenerational leadership model. That's why our program is staffed primarily by college students and recent college graduates, with a 10:1 child to adult ratio. As a result, many children and youth make significant gains in reading achievement and don't experience any summer learning loss.

Our program is proudly rooted in the American Civil Rights Movement and the courageous efforts of college-age youth to make a difference.

Since 1995, more than 150,000 children (K–12) have had the CDF Freedom Schools experience, and more than 17,000 young adults and child advocates have been trained on the delivery of the CDF Freedom Schools model, which has expanded to 182 program sites nation-wide.

The CDF Freedom Schools program has made a statistically-significant and practically-significant positive impact on students in several ways. In 2019, almost all students either improved (55.3 percent) or maintained (29.2 percent) their reading skills over the course of the six-week program and avoided the two-month summer learning loss suffered by children not participating in summer enrichment. Students reading below grade level at the beginning of the summer experienced the greatest gains.

What Your Place of Worship Can Do on the Children's Sabbath to Celebrate Children's Books that Inspire:

- **Build Your Library Collection:** Invite members to purchase a book from Children's Defense Fund booklist and link to https://cdfwebstore.com/collections/books, and donate it to the congregation's library and/or children's classrooms.
- **Read Aloud:** Have an in-person or Zoom “Read-Aloud” with leaders or members of your place of worship reading aloud from one of the books on the Freedom Schools list.
- **Drop Everything and Read:** Have a congregational “Drop Everything and Read” time—in person or virtually—when all ages are encouraged to read a book, especially those from the Freedom Schools list.
- **Launch Book Buddies:** Launch an adult-child book buddies or book club. Invite adults and children to sign up to read aloud to each other, or begin small book clubs (grouped by age) for children and a few adults to read and respond to books from the Freedom Schools list.
What Your Place of Worship Can Do On and After the Children's Sabbath to Join the CDF Freedom Schools Movement:

Help build the next generation of scholars and leaders. Join hundreds of communities in 28 states across the country to experience the transformative effects of hosting CDF Freedom Schools program sites.

- **Sponsor a Program:** Work with families, other congregations, local businesses and organizations to bring our program to your community. SPONSOR
- **Encourage College-Age and Recent College Graduate Members to Serve the Community:** Let young adults know about the possibility of joining a team of young leaders who are committed to service and advocacy on behalf of children. SERVE
- **Encourage Parents and Guardians to Enroll Their Children:** Prevent summer learning loss through our high-quality academic enrichment program so children don’t fall behind. ENROLL
- **Donate:** CDF is working to give every child what they need to thrive and reach their full potential. Every gift makes a difference in the lives of children. Designate a special offering or fundraiser to benefit the CDF Freedom Schools Program. Please donate today.
- **Learn More and Spread the Word:** Subscribe to receive monthly updates about the CDF Freedom Schools program.

**Message Masks**

The act of wearing a face mask communicates care and support for the health of others. Personalizing masks with messages can take it one step further to be a voice for justice.

What Your Place of Worship Can Do On the Children’s Sabbath to Make Message Masks:

- **Create Message Masks:** Invite all ages to design and create face masks that promote messages of kindness, justice, and faith, and that remind all that kids can’t vote but adults can. For congregations that gather in person, have a supply of plain masks (fabric or other), fabric paint, fabric markers, and other decorative materials (embroidery thread, buttons, iron-on patches, etc.).
- **Spread the Message of Your Masks:** If possible, photograph each mask-maker wearing their mask for later display. Or, post them on social media (with permission), using the hashtag #ChildrensSabbath and @childdefender.
- **Donate new masks and decorating supplies to programs serving children,** to provide the dual benefit of masks for safety and a creative activity.