

HOW TO INTRODUCE SOULSPACE

Soulspace

Here are a few suggestions for how to introduce Soulspace to your group. Use them as inspiration for adapting to your context.

Time and place

Think about when Soulspace might take place. For example:

Before or after your community meets

This could make most sense because it would emphasize that Soulspace is an optional extra – not an essential part of the main activity, but a voluntary addition to it.

If available, a separate room for Soulspace would be ideal, so that you are not disturbed. If you meet in the church building, try a circle of chairs arrangement (and bring a heater in the winter if need be).

If the room where you meet is large enough, you might create a 'spiritual zone' in a corner: find a table, cover it with a white cloth, place a candle on it, and arrange chairs in a semi-circle around the table. The chairs will serve as the 'zone's' boundary.

During your main event

You could introduce Soulspace during a community meal or as part of a cafe, for example. But it would be important to do this without it being an imposition. Guests won't want to be invited to a meal and then have spiritual input they were not warned about.

One possibility would be to hold Soulspace in a separate room, or in a corner of the hall if it is big enough (see above).

Or else, you could introduce Soulspace to the whole group, but in a way that invites people to opt out if they wish. For example, you might say:

'We are going to have our Soulspace in a few minutes...If you want to sit this out, please feel free to do so.'

OR

'We've set out a table over there where you can chat quietly with others. Or you can stay where you are, have some personal headspace, and ignore what it is going on around you. Soulspace will last only for about 10 minutes.'

Getting permission

Don't introduce Soulspace without the permission of the group.

If you are just starting out with a community group, you may want to mention Soulspace in your publicity so that people know what to expect.

If you already have an initiative and you want to add Soulspace as an optional extra, see the next section.

Introducing Soulspace

These key principles may be helpful to keep in mind:

- **A**nnounce Soulspace in a way that seeks the permission of the group.
- **C**onsult some of the individuals in the community before you launch it.
- **E**mphasise that Soulspace is an optional extra.

An example: leaders of an evening community meal wanted to introduce Soulspace before the meal. They decided:

- To sound out some individual guests over the next three sessions.
 - ◇ They would explain what Soulspace involves, **show them the handout of the outline for Connecting** and stress that it would be entirely optional.
 - ◇ They would ask:
 - Do you think people would be interested in this?
 - Would you want to come?
 - Are there others you know who might be interested?
 - Where and at what time would work best?
 - Are there ways that we should adapt it?
 - Do you think anyone would be offended if we did this on an optional basis?
 - Any other suggestions?
- If the response was encouraging, for the next three sessions they would give out a notice to the whole group.
 - ◇ They would give everyone **the handout** and explain what Soulspace involves.
 - ◇ Then they would say something like: 'We are thinking of trying Soulspace in three weeks' time. We've asked a few of you whether this might appeal, and they seemed to think it would be welcomed, so we're just going to try it out. We'll be doing it before the meal at 5.15 in the space at the centre of the church. It's entirely optional and there is absolutely no obligation for you to join in. But everyone is welcome. We want this to be a welcoming place for you, so if you feel at all uncomfortable about what we are suggesting please let us know.'
- In other words, the leaders
 - ◇ Were going to *consult with* some of the guests of their community meal.
 - ◇ They were going to announce Soulspace, not as a fait accompli, but in a way that *sought the permission* of the group.
 - ◇ And at every stage, they would stress that Soulspace was entirely optional.

How to describe Soulspace

This is an example script to help with an announcement 'from the front'. Please feel free to adapt it.

"Hi everyone. We're thinking of introducing 10-15 minutes of optional extra time to this group that we hope will help support our inner/spiritual wellbeing. We've asked a few of you whether this would be a nice idea and they thought it would be appreciated by some. So we're going to try it out for a while.

"We're calling it SoulSpace and it's for anyone who wants a moment of stillness in their busy lives, who wants time to contemplate the bigger questions of life, or who wants space to gather their thoughts and feelings and begin to process and make sense of them. We hope that, in a manner of speaking, it will be refreshing and good for the soul, hence that's why it's called 'SoulSpace'.

"It is entirely optional, so please don't feel any pressure to join in. But if you want to give it a try, we'll meet in a quiet space for about 10 minutes. During that time:

- I will be leading it all, so you won't have to say anything if you don't want, you can simply relax.
- We'll start by spending a few minutes listening to some nice music to help us focus.
- Then there'll be a short reading from a spiritual text to inspire us (or there will be a story about Jesus, who is known as one the world's greatest spiritual teachers).
- We'll then have a period of headspace for you to think about a person or situation, and, if you'd like to, there'll be time to pray about this to God, as you understand God.
- Sometimes we might use art or photos to help us think about things.
- And then we'll finish off with a poem or a short prayer.

You are all welcome, but I know this might not be for everyone so please don't feel you have to come.

But if you like the sound of this 10-minute spiritual oasis, we shall meet at *(time and date)*, in *(place)*."

For use on a flyer or invitation card

If you'd like to publicise SoulSpace, feel free to use and adapt these words to suit your context:

An invitation to SoulSpace

Do you want some

- stillness in your life?
- time to reflect, think and contemplate?
- space to gather your thoughts and feelings, and to make sense of them?

SoulSpace offers (10) minutes to:

- focus and relax, listening to some music
- listen to inspiring spiritual readings (or Listen to a story about Jesus, a great spiritual teacher)
- contemplate the spiritual side of life using art, pictures, poems and prayers (or Connect with God as you understand God).

We shall meet at...*(time and place)*

Note: SoulSpace is an optional extra – there is no pressure to come!

How to answer the question: “Why are you doing this?”

These are few suggestions for how to answer this question. Feel free to use these words as inspiration for writing your own version:

A “We know how busy life can get and there never seems to be enough time just to ‘be’. Not having that time can close us off from enriching experiences in a quiet space – things like inner healing and processing our emotions. Some of us might find there’s even a spiritual atmosphere to that space that gives us a sense of peace, hope, or comfort. We’ll trial it for a while and see how it goes, and we’d love to hear how else people benefit from having that time.”

OR

B “We are excited by what we are doing here in our group, and we love all those who come. It seems to us that what is happening here is that people are experiencing a fuller life. They are making friends. They are (drinking great coffee... *Add your examples*). The atmosphere is really welcoming. And all this adds up to a richer life. SoulSpace is really just an optional extension of that – the opportunity to experience the richness of life but in a different kind of way, in a spiritual way.”

OR

C “As you may know, several of us are Christians, and as Christians we follow Jesus, who is known as one of the world’s greatest spiritual leaders. One of the things Jesus said is that he’d come so that people could have an abundant life – a life of fullness.

And so that’s what we want to share – richness of life: in what we are already doing here, but also in offering this spiritual oasis called SoulSpace.”

OR

D “SoulSpace is designed for anyone, whether they have some kind of spiritual faith or not. There is no pressure to believe specific things. You can just absorb what is going on, relax in the space, enjoy the music, the readings and the pictures, and hope that the experience is helpful in some way, whether that’s bringing a sense of peace, hope, stillness or simply feeling better inside. Some people may find it helps them to feel connected to something bigger than themselves, or they might feel moved to pray, or they may feel nothing at all – that is OK. It is simply an opportunity to explore whether this time will be helpful to you – we hope that it will be.”

OR

E “While we’ve been talking together, we’ve heard conversations that have touched on ethical/spiritual themes, and some of you have questions or wonderings about faith/our purpose in life/the life beyond this one. SoulSpace might be a way to explore some of those thoughts and feelings in a spiritual context. Your specific questions might not always be answered, but it may help to unlock some deeper reflection for you. We’re always here to talk any time too, if you want to.”

OR

F Your own words.