

# Ways to connect: an introduction



These cards are based on the 'How to' resources produced by Friends General Conference (FGC), and are reproduced with the kind permission of the Clerks of the Youth Ministries Committee, FGC (USA).

Have you ever found yourself in a group where you felt that what you were saying wasn't heard, or that what you were saying wasn't understood? How did it make you feel? How did it leave you feeling about the group?

Young Friends have commented that "large age gaps in some local meetings create a negative effect on young people's participation. Some people have found that all age activities are beneficial for this." Similar experiences can also be true for other people in meetings.

The aim of these 'ways to connect' cards are to promote and develop the way you think about the place of young Friends (from the age of 12 and above) in your local meeting. There are eight subject areas in ways to connect:

- communicate in ways that include young Friends
- include young Friends on committees
- engage in intergenerational conversations
- Quaker practices that might be helpful to young Friends
- plan an intergenerational event
- stay in touch with young Friends
- integrate young Friends into meeting
- why young Friends are vital to the Religious Society of Friends

### **Find out more**

Friends that want to develop the life of their community could find intergenerational activities helpful. The *Journeys in the Spirit* special edition: 'Connecting as a Community' provides a range of ideas on how to develop relationships and make links with each other and with young Friends.

Go to: [www.quaker.org.uk/journeysyouth/](http://www.quaker.org.uk/journeysyouth/) select 'special issues'; click 'Connecting as a community'.

# Ways to connect: communicate in ways that include young Friends



It can feel daunting to find ways to communicate effectively with young Friends for many reasons and because of different needs or interests, but it is not impossible.

Some ideas:

- Make conversation. Make them feel wanted and appreciated. Be interested in what they have to say. Ask about their interests and spiritual journeys (find more ideas in the 'engage in intergenerational conversations' card).
- Have a living, vibrant faith, and talk about it. Be willing to explore and answer questions.
- Don't be frustrated with young Friends if they miss meeting. Think about why this might be and ask what you can do about it.
  - » Do they need a lift?
  - » would different time better fit their needs?
  - » enquire about what might be happening in their life at this time.
- Encourage young Friends to attend meeting gently. Share with them what you would gain from their presence and explore with them what they might gain from participating. Be alongside them in where their lives are at this time.
- There are many ways to keep everyone in contact. Update and encourage those who attend less frequently back, or invite those seeking a new spiritual home:
  - » Create a local meeting website with regular updates, news and events. Encourage young Friends to write a blog; write an article for the site, or make a youtube video.
  - » Have an email group with regular news about what's happening and / or when meetings are held. Remember to regularly publicise this so new people can sign up. Encourage young Friends to write some of these updates.
  - » Create a regular newsletter with news and views for the whole meeting. Encourage young Friends to write articles, to be the editor, or coordinate the articles from willing participants for each edition.



Ways to connect: include young Friends on committees



Young Friends often lead busy lives and have a lot of school work, especially at certain times of the year. They may not have the flexibility or financial resources to be at all meetings for the entire time. Hold them accountable for coming as much as is possible, and be tender with them as they discern this. Find ways to work with them (i.e. consider the timings of your meeting; try teleconferencing; welcome them when they arrive; arrange carpools, or locate meetings near public transport).

Some ways to achieve this:

- Make sure that all young Friends in the meeting know that they are valued for their spiritual gifts and presence in your community. Be on the lookout for the spiritual gifts and ministries of young Friends. Challenge your own assumptions about age and wisdom, and be willing to learn from people of all ages.
- Find out what skills and gifts young Friends in your meeting have. Affirm their gifts by encouraging them to serve on an appropriate committee and submit their name to a nominating committee. Don't assume that they should be on children and young people's work committees – young Friends have many other insights and skills to offer.
- Pay attention to their gifts and encourage their participation by naming those gifts to them.
- Seek out younger people and new people to be on committees. Don't target the same people every time. If a young Friend says no, ask them for suggestions for other names.
- Talk to those who coordinate activities for young people in your area, monthly or yearly meetings for ideas. (Consider talking to your Area Meeting Advocate about this.)
- Dare to nominate or include someone who does not have a lot of committee experience – this is how people learn about Quaker process.
- Consider looking at new ways of doing things that may be more welcoming to younger Friends. Be open to adjusting your committee structure and environment so that it is more easily accessible to Friends of all ages.

## Ways to connect: engage in intergenerational conversations



Intergenerational conversations can become problematic when a person assumes that because of differences in age they cannot find common ground. They can also be difficult when a person assumes that because of their age that they are only in a position to give or to receive in the conversation, and don't expect the conversation to be reciprocal.

Conversations in which we engage in listening and being listened to are the interactions that are most satisfying and memorable for all.

### **There are lots of things you might do:**

- Share your passion.  
Be open and honest in both your listening and in what you say.  
Be curious (and genuine). Don't be afraid to ask questions.
- Talk about things they are interested in and share your thoughts.
- Be yourself. People of all ages have a diverse and broad range of social skills. Go out on a limb and start a conversation with someone you don't know. Enjoy your experience together, and think about how you might follow it up next time.
- If you don't know what to say, just relax. Share from your heart. Don't worry about your age or how you look. Just engage in a caring way. See what happens.
- Be aware. It's nice that meetings can be busy and vibrant, but during coffee after meeting do you notice the person standing on their own, or the new couple with no one talking to them?

# Ways to connect: Quaker Practices that might be helpful to young Friends



It is often asked how we can support young Friends. There are a number of early Friends' traditions that can help us support and challenge one another to live more fully into our Light and our callings. Often under-used, they can provide powerful ways for Friends of all ages and life stages to deepen their faith, test out leadings, and explore new opportunities.

Some initial ways to support:

- Meetings for clearness. A meeting for clearness is a small group that meets with a person who is facing a significant decision in their life (*Quaker faith and practice (Qfp)* 12:22-25). Through listening and asking questions, the group helps the individual discern the leading of the Spirit and the way forward.
- Letter of greeting. A meeting may write a letter of introduction for one of their community who plans to travel and may be visiting other meetings (*Qfp* 12:29). Letters of introduction might also be useful to young Friends who move away for college, boarding school, or a first job.
- A travelling minute. An endorsement written by a meeting on behalf of a member who is travelling under the weight of a concern, a travelling minute can serve to introduce the individual to a meeting and communicate the depth of the concern carried (*Qfp* 13:28).

For more information see **[www.quaker.org.uk](http://www.quaker.org.uk)** and click on support for meetings/ pastoral care/ resources.

- Try some traditions from overseas. For example from North America:
  - » Anchoring Committees: After discerning the truth of a leading an individual may ask an anchoring committee to help guide, support, and hold them accountable in following the leading.
  - » Spiritual Friendships: A formal relationship between two people who make an intentional commitment to journey and share together as their spiritual lives unfold. Such friendships can occur between people of the same or different age groups.

## Ways to connect: plan an intergenerational event



Many meetings have trouble planning inclusive events. First and foremost, it is important that the event itself is well planned. When planning, think about:

- Who do you want to invite? Is the event intending to include:
  - » families (including young children (age 1-12) and babies)? If so, do you need to arrange child care?
  - » young Friends (age 12-18)? If so, consider transport needs and the times when the event will be held.
  - » Young Adult Friends (age 18-30)?
  - » Older Friends (age 30+)?
- If you want young Friends, young adults and families to attend, involve them in the planning. This makes it more likely that a broad range of individuals will feel welcomed and be likely to attend.
- Consider whether there may be particular concerns around physical accessibility (i.e. step free entrances), impaired vision and / or hearing. Support young Friends to help in finding out what accessibility issues there may be for the event.
- Think about when to hold the event. Timing can be crucial. An event held during the school term time or early in the morning may be less welcoming to young Friends and / or young adults than one held later in the day or during school breaks.
- Has the planning for the event taken into account a theme, the needs, interests, and attention-spans of all those included in the event?
- Think about where the event will be held and the finances involved in holding it and planning it.
- Think about the frequency. Do you want it be regular? Holding some events (like a monthly games night). Or an event at traditional times for meetings can allow Friends of all ages to plan ahead of time and make it a regular fixture in their diaries.

## Ways to connect: stay in touch with young Friends



Young Friends who have been with the meeting for years will become young adults who head off to college, a new job, or some other adventure. Just as you have nurtured them for years, you can continue to support them and let them know that they still have a home meeting and that they will not be forgotten.

Some ideas:

- Send birthday cards or care packages (like a box of food or toiletries). Ask them what they might need or like.
- Give them a gift subscription to:
  - » *Young Quaker* [http://yfgm.quaker.org.uk/pages/Young\\_Quaker](http://yfgm.quaker.org.uk/pages/Young_Quaker)
  - » *Quaker Voices* <http://www.quaker.org.uk/quaker-voices> (call 020 8446 5772)
  - » *the Friend* <http://www.thefriend.org/> (call 020 7663 1178).
- Take turns to write to them once a month. Involve or encourage young Friends who knew them and are still around to write.
- Keep them in touch and up to date – if you have a meeting emailing list don't take them off unless they ask. Remember to send them updates on the area and monthly meeting news (a newsletter is a great way of doing this).
- Have a spiritual Friend or elder keep in touch with them.
- Write a note of introduction to the clerk of the meeting where they now live as well as pointing them in the direction of the Quaker Chaplain if they are going to university.  
See <http://www.quaker.org.uk/university-chaplains>.
- Welcome or acknowledge them, after meeting, if they are back for a visit.
- Encourage them to attend Yearly Meeting and Young Friends General Meeting. (YFGM is the national organisation for Young Quakers in Britain and organises a number of events that enable young Friends from around Britain to get together for social and spiritual gatherings.) Remember to ask if they need financial assistance to attend these. Go to: [http://yfgm.quaker.org.uk/pages/About\\_YFGM](http://yfgm.quaker.org.uk/pages/About_YFGM) for more information.

## Ways to connect: integrate young Friends into meeting



It can seem daunting to include young Friends in meeting but it's not impossible. Some ideas to integrate young Friends:

- Schedule times for social interaction in ways other than meeting for worship; for example, eating together as a community.
- Think about occasionally holding meeting a little later in the morning or day.
- Offer activities especially for them. Seek out volunteers who are enthusiastic about the spiritual journeys of those who attend and the material used. Consider how the groups formed through these activities might link in to meeting.
- Be aware of how they are involved in the wider life of Britain Yearly Meeting. Be supportive of their attendance at regional and national events. For example, a nomination to Junior Yearly Meeting, or funding attendance at a Summer event or Leaveners weekend shows positive encouragement of your meeting's connection with younger members.
- Invite them to your Meetings for Worship for Business. Encourage their participation by asking them to contribute on specific issues. Listen to what they have to say.
- Include them in the meeting's outreach efforts and other meaningful tasks. Seek out their opinions and suggestions, and act on them.
- Encourage young Friends in your meeting to consider membership. Listen carefully to their thoughts, feelings and perspectives. Take time to think about how you might respond to this either as an individual or a meeting.
- Find out more by contacting the Children and Young People's (CYP) Staff Team who can put you in touch with your local CYP Advocate or provide you with the resources and advice you require.

For more information contact CYP staff team on 020 7663 1013, or email **[bevelies@quaker.org.uk](mailto:bevelies@quaker.org.uk)**.

Ways to connect: young Friends are vital to the Religious Society of Friends



An intergenerational community keeps Quakerism alive and thriving.

Ministry is a gift which each person brings to meeting. Excluding young Friends deprives us of those voices. Younger and older Friends bring different gifts. Though they may not always be the same, they are all equal and all are vital for a healthy and thriving Religious Society of Friends.

### **Why young Friends are vital:**

- Many young Friends bring a deep and alive sense of the Spirit which supports the powerful spiritual community for which we all yearn. Creating different, broader awareness for expressions of the Spirit helps keep worship vigorous.
- Young Friends are a source of good and original ideas. They often bring a sense of joy, fun, and play, that invigorates our faith communities.
- Input from a variety of perspectives and experiences keeps meetings vibrant. Different perspectives can be helpful and illuminating. New ways of doing things that have never been considered can bring new life to old practices.
- Hearing young people's voices helps adults to understand how they really feel about issues. It's important to take into account the views of all those who are a part of the meeting.
- From young people's point of view, being listened to and included in processes helps them to feel valued, involved, and a true part of the meeting.
- Older Friends can share their wisdom and experience about our Quaker history. Intergenerational community offers this opportunity, so that it may be passed onto different generations.
- Young Friends can share their experiences, insight and understanding of facilitating groups.