



What about the children in our Meeting?

Exploring the purposes of Quaker children's work



Introduction:

This simple pack offers ways to consider or review the purposes of what is offered to children in your Local or Area Meeting and to reflect on children's place and participation in the Quaker community.

It is intended to build on the children's work that your Meeting already does or is thinking about. We also hope that, by reflecting in these ways, you will come to appreciate and value what you already do or intend to do.

We are all co-disciples and fellow pilgrims on individual and shared spiritual and religious journeys. A key purpose of this pack is to give a challenge to adults assisting with and participating in Children's Meeting for Worship. Can you, with others, discern ways to enable children to continue exploring the meaning of God and the presence and possibilities of the Divine, of Love, that they have already begun?

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1,2 and 3

In a Quaker community children need:

1. To be valued, affirmed and cared for safely as individuals so that their different needs are met.
2. Acceptance as a valid part of the Quaker community – this includes full participation in and contribution to the life of the Meeting, only doing separately what cannot, properly, be done together.
3. Freedom and nurture to develop spiritually. To be equipped and encouraged for their spiritual journey and quest.
4. Encouragement and help in identifying and learning about what it means to be a Quaker in general and personally.

Quotations and Resources

Quaker Faith & Practice Advice and Query 1.19:

- Rejoice in the presence of children and young people in your meeting and recognise the gifts they bring.
- Remember that the meeting as a whole shares a responsibility for every child in its care.
- Seek for them as for yourself a full development of God's gifts and the abundant life Jesus tells us can be ours.
- How do you share your deepest beliefs with them, while leaving them free to develop as the spirit of God may lead them?
- Do you invite them to share their insights with you? Are you ready both to learn from them and to accept your responsibilities towards them?

The Spirit of the Child - David Hay and Rebecca Nye. An excellent book of research and theology about the spirituality of children. Quaker Life Resources Room and Quaker Bookshop. ISBN -13: 978 1 84310 371 4

'Pastoral Care of Children and Young People' – Quaker Life Resources Room and the Quaker Bookshop

Some guidance for the use of this pack:

In general :

This pack is based on the four needs of children in a Quaker meeting listed at the bottom of the front page. In this pack there are 3 activities for meetings or groups of Friends to work on:

- Activity 1 is based on needs 1 & 2
- Activity 2 is based on needs 3 & 4
- Activity 3 is about creating and planning what to do next

In activity sessions :

- Ask one person to be the facilitator for all the sessions. There are 3 activity sheets. The first two offer ways to reflect on 'What do children need in a Quaker community?' The third provides ways to think about and record actions that individuals and the meeting are going to take as a result of thought and discernment.
- The worksheets can all be worked through by a single group in your Meeting or they could be used by different groups at the same time with groups sharing what they have done and planning their next steps corporately.
- The programme could be worked through over three evenings, in a half-day session, after a meeting for Worship, in a business meeting, before or after a specially arranged meal.
- On the worksheets there are approximate minimum and maximum times for each of the exercises or activities. These will depend on the size of the groups.
- As well as exploration or review, there is also an intention for you to write a child friendly statement of the purposes of children's work in your Meeting. This could then be used as a way of monitoring, with Friends of all ages, how the Meeting as a whole is living up to its goals.
- Some guidelines for working together; these could be given to each person or written up on a big sheet of paper:
 - Listen* *Ask questions* *Think imaginatively*
 - Share* *Respect each other*
 - Treat people's personal stories as confidential*

In specific activities :

Creative listening - how to do it.

- For the purposes of this pack, this activity is time limited. This plan allows for 20 – 30 minutes. This should be said at the beginning of the session.

- The facilitator should bring a 'talking object'. This can be a stone, a pebble, a shell, a stick or a soft toy.
- The question for consideration is outlined at the start of the session and the facilitator starts the creative listening by picking up the 'talking object' and speaking first. When the last person has spoken, the object will be back where it started. In creative listening participants only speak when holding the 'talking object'. When a speaker finishes, she or he passes the object to the next person who pauses before speaking.
- The facilitator should say something about listening in this context. When someone is speaking there is no comment or discussion - just acceptance of it as a gift. No advice, judgment, question or discussion should follow one person's contribution.
- At the end there should be a brief period of quiet.
- There is no requirement for everybody to contribute.

A 'quick think' or 'brainstorm' - how to do it.

- The facilitator writes the question or issue that is being discussed on a big sheet of paper.
- Everybody is invited to call out ideas or responses that occur to them. Allow enough time for the facilitator to write them down. It is best if, at this stage, there is no discussion as this can stall the process.
- When it seems that ideas are beginning to slow, the facilitator can ask if there is anything else that people want to add before ending this part of the activity.
- If there is time there can be some conversation to allow people to ask questions for clarification of what has been said. Some ideas may need a little more expansion. These become tools for use in the action planning.

Action planning - how to do it.

- The facilitator should make sure that everybody has a copy of this booklet and Activity Sheet 3 on action planning.
- The facilitator should then begin a conversation, based on the quick think sheets or post-it notes about which ideas or hopes that the group wants to take further – to Local or Area Meeting for example. It is important to remember that, whatever the make-up of the group working together, the discernment is being done on behalf of the whole Meeting as a multi-generational community.
- It can be easy to get distracted by discussion. However, it is important to reach a consensus about which things, at this stage, the group wants to take forward. Be grounded and realistic. Other things can always be placed on a list to come back to. Agree tasks, timescales and who is going to do what.

Useful Resources

'Journeys in the Spirit' – an invaluable monthly resource for Quakers engaging with children aged 4 –12 years in a Quaker setting:

Series 1: editions 0 – 3 were on four aspects of spiritual development. **Series 2:** editions 4 – 8 were on the Quaker Testimonies. **Series 3:** the current series is themed: Quakers: a people of God: being and doing. Alternating editions on Quaker religious and spiritual practice and Quaker work in the world.

To subscribe email:

journeyschild@quaker.org.uk or phone 020 7663 1013

To look at some previous editions go to: www.quaker.org.uk/cyp and follow the link to Resources.

'**CORE training for Churches**' - ecumenical resources for children's worker training:

www.coreskillsforchurches.com

'**Caring for the whole child – a holistic approach to spirituality**' – John Bradford -The Children's Society. Quaker Life Resources Room.

'**Spiritual Development – a first step for youth workers and young people**' – John Lee. Excellent booklet available free from the Children and Young People's Staff Team.

For the Quaker Life Resources Room look at the catalogue online at: www.quaker.org.uk/library and follow links from 'Search the Catalogue' in the sidebar

For free materials and loans from the Quaker Life Resources Room Contact Bevelie Shember on 020 7663 1013 or at

bevelies@quaker.org.uk

Personal notes.

Resources and acknowledgements

Thank you to Susie Harding, Chris Nickolay and members of the former Quaker Life Children and Young People's and Publications Committees for their work on this January 2008 version of a pamphlet first published in 2002.

Thank you, also, to the children at Exeter Yearly Meeting 2001 Under 19s programme (the Tiggywinkles, the Fox Cubs and the Eagles), the children at Yearly Meeting 2002, the 6 Preparative Meetings, the individual Friends, attendees and members of Children & Young People's Committee who gave a lot of time, help, thought and careful feedback in the inventing, piloting, rewriting and proof reading of the first version of this pack over 3 years.

More copies of this can be printed from the Britain Yearly Meeting website:

www.quaker.org.uk/cyp and follow links from the sidebar to Resources.

Copies are also available free from the Children and Young People's Staff Team. Please phone; 020 7663 1013 or email bevelies@quaker.org.uk

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**Published by Quaker Life
2008**