



Relevant quotes for Sex and Relationships

Relationships and sex is a topic that touches us all at depth. It can be helpful to engage with Quaker writings and materials and also draw on other resources on relationships, sex and sexuality available.

You could use these quotes as discussion starters, adapt for your own activities, or print and use as handouts for participants.

Brief quotes

Human sexuality is a divine gift, forming part of the complex union of body, mind and spirit which is our humanity. The sexual expression as a loving relationship can bring delight, joy and fulfilment. (QFP 22.11)

Our sexuality is an integral part of being human, giving warmth and power to all our loving.
(QFP 22.12)

Sexual activity is essentially neither good nor evil; it is a normal biological activity which...can be indulged in destructively or creatively. (QFP 22.13)

Our sexuality is, throughout, an expression of ourselves...We should therefore give thanks for our sexuality and seek to nurture it both within ourselves and in our loving relationships.
(QFP 22.14)

We realise that our sexual nature can be a cause of great pain as well as great joy.
(QFP 22.16)

Sexuality neither good nor evil but a gift from God which can be misused. (*Towards a Quaker View of Sex, 1963*)

People in sexual difficulties feel left out, isolated and rejected.
(*Towards a Quaker View of Sex, 1963*)

In a relationship there needs to be respect for the other person in order to avoid exploitation. (*Towards a Quaker View of Sex, 1963*)

Sex is an emotional experience and can also be spiritual. (*Who do we think we are? 1998*)

Poor sex (rape) is an abuse and diminishes a person. (*Who do we think we are? 1998*)

Expressing emotions and sexual feelings with parents can be very difficult. (*This we can say, 1995*)

There is an image of respectability about Quakers which can make open discussion harder. (*This we can say, 1995*)

Relationships need space in order to flourish and creative listening can help to give this space and help people overcome their preconceptions about different forms of relationship. (*This we can say, 1995*)

Quaker Faith and Practice – full quotes

22.11

Human sexuality is a divine gift, forming part of the complex union of body, mind and spirit which is our humanity. The sexual expression of a loving relationship can bring delight, joy and fulfilment.

For many, a life-long faithful relationship gives the opportunity for the greatest personal development and for the experience of sexual love which is spiritual in its quality and deeply mysterious. Others may find fulfilment in different ways. Whatever the moral climate, a sexual relationship is never purely a private matter without consequences for wider human relationships. Its effect on the community, and especially on children, must always be considered. Sexual morality is an area of challenge and opportunity for living our testimonies to truth, nonviolence, equality, integrity and love.

In our *Advices* of 1964 we are reminded:

No relationship can be a right one which makes use of another person through selfish desire.

22.12

Our sexuality is an integral part of our being human, giving warmth and power to all our loving. Yet it is difficult for us to love both fully and wisely; too easy often to be niggardly and cautious in giving of ourselves, or grasping and selfish in satisfying our desires. These failures will lead to stress and conflict; but painful as they are, such experiences can still be a means of growth in understanding and an eventual strengthening of a relationship.

Elizabeth Seale Carnall, 1981

22.13

No doubt from the earliest days of Christianity there have been men and women for whom the sexual relationship was illumined and deepened by the Christian message of love, for whom it expressed a true equality, an equal-sided valuation and respect, for whom coitus was an expression of tenderness and unity, not merely the gratification of animal urges. But it is one of the great tragedies of history that not until recent times has this implication of Christianity found public expression ...

Sexual activity is essentially neither good nor evil; it is a normal biological activity which, like most other human activities, can be indulged in destructively or creatively. Further, if we take impulses and experiences that are potentially wholesome and in a large measure unavoidable and characterise these as sinful, we create a great volume of unnecessary guilt and an explosive tension within the personality. When, as so often happens, the impulse breaks through the restriction, it does so with a ruthlessness and destructive energy that might not otherwise have been there. A distorted Christianity must bear some of the blame for the sexual disorders of society.

Towards a Quaker view of sex, 1963

22.14

In the journey through life, as we grow and mature, live singly or in a relationship with others our sexuality will grow, develop and change. Our sexual needs, drives and fantasies will be different at different stages in our life - as a teenager, a partner, a parent, an older person. Our sexuality is, throughout, an expression of ourselves. It is an integral part of our humanity and as such is subject to the leadings of the spirit. We should therefore give thanks for our sexuality and seek to nurture it both within ourselves and in our loving relationships.

Bill Edgar, 1994

22.15

It is the nature and quality of a relationship that matters: one must not judge it by its outward appearance but by its inner worth. Homosexual affection can be as selfless as heterosexual affection, and therefore we cannot see that it is in some way morally worse.

Homosexual affection may of course be an emotion which some find aesthetically disgusting, but one cannot base Christian morality on a capacity for such disgust. Neither are we happy with the thought that all homosexual behaviour is sinful: motive and circumstances degrade or ennoble any act ...

We see no reason why the physical nature of a sexual act should be the criterion by which the question whether or not it is moral should be decided. An act which (for example) expresses true affection between two individuals and gives pleasure to them both, does not seem to us to be sinful by reason alone of the fact that it is homosexual. The same criteria seem to us to apply whether a relationship is heterosexual or homosexual. *Towards a Quaker view of sex, 1963*

22.16

We affirm the love of God for all people, whatever their sexual orientation, and our conviction that sexuality is an important part of human beings as created by God, so that to reject people on the grounds of their sexual [orientation] is a denial of God's creation ... We realise that our sexual nature can be a cause of great pain as well as great joy. It is up to each one of us to recognise this pain, ... to reach out to others as best we can, and to reflect on our own shortcomings in loving others ... We need to overcome our fear of what is strange or different, because we are all vulnerable; we all need love.

Wandsworth Preparative Meeting, 1989

22.17

I was once asked by a young man with end-stage AIDS whether he would be acceptable to God, since he was a homosexual. I shall never forget the look on his face. I could not answer that depth of despair with pious phrases about the inward light or that of God in everyone ... It is impossible to address AIDS without addressing sexuality ... Being taught that one's innate bodily responses and sexuality are sinful does not give one a good basis for building loving, creative, intimate relationships. This is a problem for some heterosexuals too. Very many people with illnesses such as HIV and AIDS feel alienated, outcasts, cut off from normal human society. In the face of the losses, actual or potential, which pile up in the course of illness - loss of health, of strength, of work, of sex, of income, of friends, of home, of independence, of choice, of life itself - one can quickly feel stripped of everything that gives one any sense of self-worth. It is but a short step from this to feeling that AIDS is God's punishment. Yet the gospel (good news) is that enlightened Christian teaching is about a God who suffers alongside us, and helps us to transcend loss and suffering.

Gordon Macphail, 1989

22.18

Where there is genuine tenderness, an openness to responsibility, and the seed of commitment, God is surely not shut out. Can we not say that God can enter any relationship in which there is a measure of selfless love? and is not every generalisation we make qualified by this?

Towards a Quaker view of sex, 1963

22.19

The Yearly Meeting has struggled to find unity on this [subject of sexuality], which comes so close to the personal identity and choices of each one of us. We are still struggling for the words which will help us, so that we may come to know the balance which allows us both to deal with the personal tensions of our own response to sexuality and also to see ourselves as all equal in the sight of God.

The extracts in this section are an anthology of the evolving experience of Friends and meetings. While our own [individual] experience does not identify with every extract, we recognise, in love, the Friend whose experience is not our own. We pray

for ourselves, that we may not divide but keep together in our hearts.

London Yearly Meeting, 1994

Perceptions of Truth

26.30

What is love? What shall I say of it, or how shall I in words express its nature? It is the sweetness of life; it is the sweet, tender, melting nature of God, flowing up through his seed of life into the creature, and of all things making the creature most like unto himself, both in nature and operation. It fulfils the law, it fulfils the gospel; it wraps up all in one, and brings forth all in the oneness. It excludes all evil out of the heart, it perfects all good in the heart. A touch of love doth this in measure; perfect love doth this in fullness.

Isaac Penington, 1663

26.31

I do believe that there is a power which is divine, creative and loving, though we can often only describe it with the images and symbols that rise from our particular experiences and those of our communities. This power is part and parcel of all things, human, animal, indeed of all that lives. Its story is greater than anyone cultural version of it and yet it is embodied in all stories, in all traditions. It is a power that paradoxically needs the human response. Like us it is energised by the reciprocity of love. It wills our redemption, longs for us to turn to it. It does not create heaven and hell for us, but allows us to do that for ourselves. Such is the terrible vulnerability of love.

Harvey Gillman, 1988

26.32

Perhaps more wonderful still is the way in which beauty breaks through. It breaks through not only at a few highly organised points, it breaks through almost everywhere. Even the minutest things reveal it as well as do the sublimest things, like the stars. Whatever one sees through the microscope, a bit of mould for example, is charged with beauty. Everything from a dewdrop to Mount Shasta is the bearer of beauty. And yet beauty has no function, no utility. Its value is intrinsic, not extrinsic. It is its own excuse for being. It greases no wheels, it bakes no puddings. It is a gift of sheer grace, a gratuitous largesse. It must imply behind things a Spirit that enjoys beauty for its own sake and that floods the world everywhere with it. Wherever it can break through, it does break through, and our joy in it shows that we are in some sense kindred to the giver and revealer of it.

Rufus Jones, 1920

26.33

To apply the term 'God' (in the Christian sense) is to say that we perceive intuitively a connection between the marvels of the natural world, the moral law, the life of Jesus, the depths of the human personality, our intimations about time, death and eternity, our experience of human forgiveness and love, and the finest insights of the Christian tradition. To deny the existence of 'God' is to say that we cannot (yet) see such connections. But even the word 'God' is not an essential tool for grasping them.

John Lampen, 1985

26.34

It is not an accident that throughout the centuries women have provided the core of Christian worship. Although, in order to fulfil the Divine Will at that particular place and time, Jesus was born as the son of Joseph, when he passed out of time into eternity surely sex was transcended. Might we not gain also if the male image of the Lord Almighty were replaced in our

imagination by a conception more in line with Julian's vision of the Mother-Christ, the dual emblem of the mystery of creative love?

Katharine Moore, 1978

26.35

All my life I've heard, 'God is love', without understanding what was meant. Recently I've come to feel that in a very real way G-d/ess is the love that flows in and between and among us. The ebb and flow of my commitment to love, to peace, to harmony makes G-d/ess stronger or weaker in my heart.

Sometimes the web feels like G-d/ess' body, her vast cosmos, of which we are an inextricable part. The web is also the love that flows through creation, from G-d/ess, from us, from everywhere. The web is an affirmation and comfort, support and clear-naming. The web is harmony, proving to me by its fleeting, fragile appearances that peace can happen. Most of all, for me, the web is friendship.

That the web exists is my faith. Spinning at it, dancing along it and calling others into it are my ministry. Ripping it or withdrawing into isolation and despair are my sins. Articulating my faith is hard enough; living it is often beyond me. But we are all connected. Strength seeps in from everywhere and amazing things happen. The sense of participation and communion sweeps over me like ocean waves.

At the end of the article from which this extract is taken, the writer explained her use of 'G-d/ess':

I've yet to find a term that describes how I feel about the divine. 'The Spirit' comes close, and so, sometimes, does 'Goddess'. 'G-d/ess' attempts to convey the difficulty of naming the divine. The dash is an old Jewish practice meant to show the impossibility of confining the divine in a word. The single 'd' and feminine suffix are to show that I don't experience the goddess as different from or inferior to what folks generally refer to as God.

Rose Ketterer, 1987

26.36

As the Yearly Meeting in 1994 struggled to find unity on whether 26.35 should have a place in our book of discipline, Jo Farrow wrote:

In the seventeenth century the first generation of Friends shocked many of their Christian neighbours. In trying to express their experiences of God - within them, as spirit, inward light, seed, inward teacher - they used words and phrases which sounded strange and audacious to their contemporaries. They spoke of their experiences of being drawn into community with one another using metaphors and analogies which were both new and old at the same time. 'The kingdom of God did gather us all in a net...' wrote Francis Howgill, trying to express the sense of relief and excitement which was theirs when they discovered one another and became aware of how deeply they had been drawn together as they struggled to articulate their experiences of the Spirit. In much the same way many women today are discovering a need to express their spirituality in ways which seem as strange to some Friends as the expressions of early Quaker spirituality did to those who first heard them. Rose Ketterer is a member of Haddonfield Friends Meeting, New Jersey. She writes of her attempts to reclaim a more womanly understanding of the divine.

26.37

Religion is living with God. There is no other kind of religion. Living with a Book, living with or by a Rule, being awfully high-principled are not in themselves religion, although many people think they are and that. that is all there is to it. Religion has got a bad name through being identified with an outward orderliness. But an outward orderliness can be death, dullness and masochism. Doing your duty may be admirable stoicism; it isn't religion.

To find religion itself you must look inside people and inside yourself. And there, if you find even the tiniest grain of true love, you may be on the right scent. Millions of people have it and don't know what it is that they have. God is their guest, but they haven't the faintest idea that he is in the house. So you mustn't only look where God is confessed and acknowledged. You must look everywhere, to find the real religion. Nor must you look, in others or in yourself, for great spooky visions and revelations. Such visions and revelations come to many, a great deal of ten er than we think; and to those to whom they come they are sun, moon and stars. But in most people who know God, and in all such people most of the time, living with God is not an apparition but a wordless and endless sureness. Like the silence of two friends together. Like the silence of lovers.

God is waiting to live like that in every single person in the world. Bernard Canter, 1962

26.38

God for me is the whole; and 'in him I live and move and have my being' ... Since I am a person God must be in some measure personal. But the universe is full of other energies, and so God is other than personal too. With Gerard Manley Hopkins I sense that he is 'past all grasp, God'; and yet with Tennyson I am sure that 'Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet'. This is so infinitely wonderful and mysterious that my natural human conceit is checked, I see myself in perspective, and worship becomes a rational response. Reverence for the world, for life, for man, leads on inescapably to reverence for the whole which I call God.

Donald Court, 1965

26.39

True faith is not assurance, but the readiness to go forward experimentally, without assurance. It is a sensitivity to things not yet known. Quakerism should not claim to be a religion of certainty, but a religion of uncertainty; it is this which gives us our special affinity to the world of science. For what we apprehend of truth is limited and partial, and experience may set it all in a new light; if we too easily satisfy our urge for security by claiming that we have found certainty, we shall no longer be sensitive to new experiences of truth. For who seeks that which he believes that he has found? Who explores a territory which he claims already to know?

Charles F Carter, 1971

26.40

I do not know the course I am to run, all is hid in mystery, but I try to do right in everything ... Look up to true religion as the very first of blessings, cherish it, nourish and let it flourish and bloom in my heart; it wants taking care of, it is difficult to obtain. I must not despair or grow sceptical if I do not always feel religious. I felt God as it were, and I must seek to find Him again.

Elizabeth Fry, 1798

26.41

What is my religion? My friends, my teachers, my God. And who is my God? He speaks within me; if I mishear, my friends correct me; if I misdo, I look to Jesus Christ. How then am I taught? I hear in the silence, I ponder in solitude, and I try in the noisy crowd to practise it. What do I learn? To put gaiety before prudence, grace before pleasure, service before power. What am I commanded? To seek patience in suffering, humility in success, steadfastness always. What is forbidden me? To reject another's love, to despise another's wisdom, to blaspheme another's God. And to what purpose? To help others, that we may enter the Commonwealth of Heaven together, each to find our Being in the Whole.

Frederick Parker-Rhodes, 1977

FAITH AND PRACTICE of Baltimore Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends

Marriage

Marriage, undertaken with divine assistance and solemnized in God's presence, is a creative and joyful relationship. When two people make their vows to each other in the presence of God and their friends, they take each other as life-long partners, promising with divine assistance to be faithful to each other. Implicit in their covenant for life is a commitment to resolve, with God's help, the problems and disagreements that arise in living together.

Marriage presents unique opportunities for growth. Many of these challenges come wrapped in love. The need for equality and sharing within a marriage places on both partners the responsibility to preserve and build family life. Some redefinition of roles and sacrifice of traditional privileges may be necessary. Close to each other we become aware of our strengths and weaknesses, responsibly carrying them together.

We thank God, then for the pleasures, joys and triumphs of marriage; for the cups of tea we bring each other, and the seedlings in the garden frame; for the domestic drama of meetings and partings, sickness and recovery; for the grace of occasional extravagance, flowers on birthdays and unexpected presents; for talk at evenings of the events of the day; for the ecstasy of caresses; for gay mockery of each other's follies; for plans and projects, fun and struggle; praying that we may neither neglect nor undervalue these things, nor be tempted to think of them as self-contained and self-sufficient.

(London Yearly Meeting, 1959)

When difficulties arise, members should feel free to come to their Meeting for help and counsel. Meetings, in turn, should assist in finding solutions, guiding the couple to professional counselors if advisable. The Yearly Meeting Counseling Service may be of assistance. If, despite the best efforts of all concerned, members find that their commitments cannot be sustained, they should work for an amicable parting, avoiding if possible adversarial proceedings. Meetings should be supportive of persons in such a process, and accepting and affirmative afterwards. Especially heedful of the needs of children, they should help all members of a family to recreate loving homes.

Sexuality

The human reproductive process is one of life's great miracles. Sexuality, much broader than the act of reproduction itself, is a channel for perception, communication and enjoyment. Friends are aware both of the joy of human sexuality in its proper context and the need for its restraint outside this context, together with its limitations and problems when treated casually rather than as a precious gift of God to be used responsibly. We recognize too that celibacy is a special gift, a calling and an act of free will to be practiced joyfully by those who have received that gift.

Education in matters of sexuality is an area in which the home should be the dominant influence. Children should be given factual information to suit their growing understanding on sexuality, family planning, and their responsibilities in this area.

Raising Children

Friends should take responsibility for family planning, which may sometimes include adoption or provision of foster care. When the number of children exceeds the financial, physical and even spiritual capacity of the parents, a hardship is worked on all involved. Thoughtful decisions either to have or not to have children should be accepted and supported by the Meeting.

As children acquire much by imitation and absorption, family members should watch carefully their own words and actions, curb indulgence, practice forbearance, choose worthy companionship, recreation and television viewing, and subscribe to worthwhile publications. Children tend to become what is expected of them; they are susceptible to the influences of their surroundings, and early impressions are most lasting. Therefore, love and mutual respect in the home are vital. Adults should be conscious of the harmful effect on children of rigid or unrealistic expectations. We should seek to discover and nourish that of God in each child and to foster the child's own talents and leadings.

Self-discipline is the foundation on which character is built. Loving counsel and direction rather than compulsion should be the basis of development. Love, consideration, service and the acceptance of responsibility form a basis for ordered and satisfying family relationships. Children should share in the tasks of the home and in the exchange of ideas. As parents we can foster

confidence and candor between ourselves and our children. Casual, wide-ranging, honest conversation within the family, a natural means of introducing children to perplexing issues and new concepts, is a potent way of communicating ideals. Children should be taught early to speak and listen to God in their own way. Understanding and acceptance of meeting for worship can come to children early in life through attendance and parental participation. Full appreciation may come later, but uplifting reading, religious discussion and quiet waiting upon the Spirit can be practiced early.

Prayer is a precious and important part of daily life. The recognition that answers may come in unexpected ways not always understood is essential to our religious experience. Reading of the Bible and other religious literature provides opportunities for the spiritual growth of all family members, and for binding the family together. The family itself is a precious spiritual community.

The resources of the Meeting can be important for families undergoing crises. Friends should be particularly mindful of the needs of children who are experiencing pain or loss. A Meeting can provide care and understanding, acting as an extended family. Not only are we brothers and sisters in the spirit, but we may be beloved aunts and uncles of all the children in the Meeting. The resilience of the Meeting as a nurturing community encompassing many generations supports each of us throughout the many stages of our lives.

1 Corinthians 6

Just because something is technically legal doesn't mean that it's spiritually appropriate. If I went around doing whatever I thought I could get by with, I'd be a slave to my whims.

You know the old saying, "First you eat to live, and then you live to eat"? Well, it may be true that the body is only a temporary thing, but that's no excuse for stuffing your body with food, or indulging it with sex. Since the Master honors you with a body, honor him with your body!

God honored the Master's body by raising it from the grave. He'll treat yours with the same resurrection power. Until that time, remember that your bodies are created with the same dignity as the Master's body. You wouldn't take the Master's body off to a warehouse, would you? I should hope not.

There's more to sex than mere skin on skin. Sex is as much spiritual mystery as physical fact. As written in Scripture, "The two become one." Since we want to become spiritually one with the Master, we must not pursue the kind of sex that avoids commitment and intimacy, leaving us more lonely than ever—the kind of sex that can never become one. There is a sense in which sexual sins are different from all others. In sexual sin we violate the sacredness of our own bodies, these bodies that were made for God-given and God modeled love, for "becoming one" with another. Or didn't you realize that your body is a sacred place, the place of the Holy Spirit? Don't you see that you can't live however you please, squandering what God paid such a high price for? The physical part of you is not some piece of property belonging to the spiritual part of you. God owns the whole works. So let people see God in and through your body.