

Supporting Quaker communities: local.development@quaker.org.uk

This document presents a framework to consider where our Quaker communities are, using a 'restorative perspective'. It has been adapted from materials curated by a restorative collective of researchers, practitioners and school leaders, in the light of COVID-19: <https://restoreourschools.wordpress.com> website: www.restoreourschools.com

The website also includes other useful downloadable resources from 'Peacemakers' in summer 2020 for secondary and primary age children.

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Here is a blog from QPSW in December 2020 about seeing it at work in schools: <https://www.quaker.org.uk/blog/building-back-better-in-schools>

R.E.S.T.O.R.E.

This covers seven key areas to focus on and to discern in order to move forward together in these uncertain times.

The areas intersect, interconnect and affect each other, as we all do. RESTORE is a lens through which communities, Quakers included can look what is needed in these turbulent times.

The letters of the word RESTORE, could be seen as falling into two areas of need, one the recent past and our experiences of it, and the other looking ahead to how we want to be as a result of this experience.

The first four letters of the acronym, relating to **Recognise, Empathise, Safety** and **Trauma**, are connected to what has happened and its effects on us. The last three letters, relating to **Opportunity, Relationships** and **Engagement**, are key to how we are going forward into a 'new normal'.

R - Recognise

Recognition of what's happened and that our experiences during lockdown have all been different, life-changing for many and significant for us all. How do we encourage everyone to share their story of the pandemic so far?

E – Empathise

Empathy for the mix of emotions that we have in response to events at home, in our Quaker communities and in the wider world. How can we respond with empathy, compassion and self-care, whatever our stage of life and personal health?

S – build a sense of Safety

Feeling safe is paramount, both emotional and physical. How do we re-establish a sense of safety for this new normal so that all Friends are able to worship and all are able to feel part of our community? How do we help those who may have felt unsafe whilst they've been away from meeting, feel safe again?

T – reflect on our trauma

Trauma as a result of pandemic is now a collective as well as an individual experience, how does our Quaker community process this? How do we support people who have experienced very particular traumas during lockdown or who are facing an even more uncertain future?

O - take hold of the opportunity

We have an opportunity to change what needs to be changed, to reflect on what matters to us and if we'd like to do anything differently. How do we learn from this experience, now that we know we can question even seemingly fixed aspects of our Quaker worship, community and faith in action?

R – Relationships

Relationships are key, as they always have been. How do we reconnect, and (re-)build inclusive, responsive relationship at all levels in our communities? Were we as good at building these relationships in the past as we would like to have been?

E - Engagement

Engagement in our own spiritual health and living out our Quakerism in the wider world with the issues that affect us: How do we foster a community that engages with the challenges faced by Britain Yearly Meeting as it looks at becoming an anti-racist, diverse community facing a world in a climate emergency.

A focus on Recognition

For some people it will have been a very special time of deep connection with their family and may have involved shared activities that deserve to be cherished and maintained. Recording these special times may help people to recognise for themselves what they want to keep hold of and build on. They may feel sad that this special time could be over and that the moments they cherished will be forgotten, the activities they enjoyed will become memories.

For some people the lockdown will have been challenging, even traumatic. Conflicts or isolation may resulted in overwhelming feelings. They may have struggled to meet others expectations.

And for some people lockdown will have been a terrible and frightening experience, with some or all of the following – food shortages, hostility, or threats of violence, fear and pain. There may have been sickness, hospitalization of family members and even death in the close or extended family.. Experience of trauma will impact on people’s capacity to respond to the usual expectations of behaviour and output. Recognition of this will be important for managing these expectations on self and others, and may involve adapting systems, policy and practice. One final point about recognition – and this is the recognition that whatever we see and hear people do in meeting there is much more going on beneath the surface.

Questions:

How will you make time to recognise the impact the experience has had on you? How can this be best be shared in our communities?

What role could those responsible for spiritual and pastoral care play in this recognition?

How will you encourage Friends to recognise that we will not return to exactly how things were before the pandemic. How do our communities look different as a result?

A focus on Empathy

Empathy for the mix of emotions that we have in response to events at home, in our Quaker community and in the wider world.

“Empathy is communicating that incredible healing message of ‘You are not alone’” (Brené Brown).

Why is empathy important now? Beginning interactions with empathy can keep people safe by preventing unnecessary escalation of conflict. Empathy is also important for recognising and responding to trauma. We should also be aware of the signs that individuals may be suffering. According to Marshall Rosenberg, “every violent action is a tragic expression of unmet need”, and now more than ever we should be responding to these unmet needs with empathy. It is crucial that we acknowledge and recognise that we have all had different experiences of COVID-19 as we emerge from lockdown.

Questions:

How can we enact and build empathy at this time? How often do we check-in to ask *all* Friends how they are feeling and recognise what is important to them? Included in this are the main role holders/leaders.

Are our systems for formal and informal pastoral care /oversight sufficient to support Friends who may be struggling? And how does our Community support those Friends who are responsible for seeing this aspect of our Quaker communities is carried out?

How do we recognise the pressure that the pandemic has placed on our mental well-being? How can we communicate ‘It’s ok to not be ok’?

A focus on Safety

SAFETY is of course paramount, both emotional and physical.

How do we re-establish a sense of safety for this new normal so that people are able to reconnect and communities are able to thrive?

Friends will have had their sense of safety – physical and emotional – threatened in different ways by the pandemic:

- 👏 Physical safety: Friends may be concerned about whether it is safe to be in meeting yet, how the physical distancing measures will be met, whether to wear masks or not, what to do about cleaning
- 👏 Emotional safety: fear and anxiety may be prevalent; fear of catching a potentially deadly virus; fear of larger groups; fear for wider family; fear of changes to our worshipping communities.
- 👏 Ongoing physical distancing requirements may increase anxiety and impact on people's ability to engage with one another to worship. We hear of Meetings feeling divided around online, face to face and blended arrangements.

How can we restore physical and emotional safety at this time? Our need for safety can be addressed by recognising this need in ourselves, articulating it to others, listening to others with empathy and then discussing how we can make arrangements (especially regarding MfW) so that differing needs can be addressed. If we do not deal with the difficult questions and feelings, they may remain hidden and lead to resentment.

Questions

What changes do we need to make to how we meet for Friends to feel physically safe and spiritually nurtured?

How can we hear about the needs of *all* Friends? Can we accept that it might not be possible to meet these all at the same time and in the same place? How do we ensure we get the balance right?

A focus on Trauma

Trauma is now a collective as well as an individual experience, how does our Quaker community process this? And how do we support people who have experienced very particular traumas during lockdown or as a result of facing an even more uncertain future?

Collective trauma is felt in the aftermath of seismic events and can last a long time. The massive upheaval we are going through potentially brings trauma from many sources: fearing for loved ones, losing loved ones, economic insecurity, fear of an unseen enemy out there, isolation and separation during lockdown, generalized anxiety, unsafe homes, the barrage of news and social media, and life changing in the blink of an eye. It is the effects of trauma that are of concern.

Symptoms of collective trauma, as identified by experts such as Thomas Hübl and Bruce Perry, include feeling separate, isolated and distancing ourselves internally from what is experienced as difficult. Our nervous systems don't regulate well, and we can experience hyper-vigilance and emotional dissonance (a conflict between what we experience and what we express). Being aware and recognising these effects of trauma is important as we return to meeting as we all feel a great pressure to normalize things for ourselves, to rush back into the familiar, to be positive. Of course, these things are important, but if not addressed, the event and the ensuing trauma can be the invisible enemy in the room. This then has implications for the health of our community.

Questions

What balance do we need to find between being positive going forward, giving a sense of normality and recognizing difficulty and pain?

How can we process what has happened? What were we doing before the pandemic that we can build on? Have there been upsetting things that have happened during the pandemic that it would really be helpful to explore together? How can we do this?

A focus on Opportunity

The pandemic provides us with a chance to change what needs to be changed, to reflect on what matters to us and if we'd like to do anything differently. How do we learn from this experience, now that we know we can question even seemingly fixed aspects of our world?

What is opportunity? The word crisis in the Japanese language is made up of two characters, a time of danger and a time of opportunity. The Coronavirus crisis brings dangers, but also opportunities. Here, we focus on the opportunities.

Why is opportunity important now? There is an incredible opportunity right now for us individually and collectively to rethink what matters and reshape what we do and how we do it. The disruption that we are experiencing from 'life as normal' has brought an opportunity for us to reflect: to reflect on what really matters, to reflect on what we do and why we do it, to think afresh about things that we may have taken for granted. We have seen so many things we thought could not happen, happen. While this has been threatening, it also opens up our sense of possibility for what could be. How can we make the most of the opportunities that this crisis brings?

Questions

How can we capture collectively our individual reflections?

What have we come to realise that we value most about our Meeting, our work, our friends and families?

Based on what's really important, how can we make our Meeting even better? What did you enjoy from doing things differently for a while, that you think we should learn from? About other communities discovered?

What thoughts have we been having about our Quaker community, about what matters, about how we are together *now*?

A focus on Relationships

Relationships are key within our communities, as they always have been. How do we reconnect, and (re-)build inclusive, responsive relationship at all levels in our communities?

Why are relationships important now? The impact of national isolation has increased our awareness of the importance of relationships. A priority, as face-to-face meetings reopen, will be rebuilding relationships and repairing relationships where there has been harm.

Friends will return with varying degrees of anxiety, alongside ongoing uncertainties as guidance on social distancing develop, will all impact the social and emotional capacity within Meetings. There may have been differences in how worship has seemed and Friends may have explored alternative practices and maybe feeling disconnected. An intentional focus on relationships will be essential for increasing a sense of being safe and accepted.

Questions

How have our relationships changed? Which relationships have you missed whilst being away from face-to-face meeting? How have your relationships changed? With F/friends, and family?

Have some Friends found alternative sources of spiritual nurture.

Who has been isolated or excluded from communication or meeting? Who aren't we seeing?

How can we build, maintain and repair relationships at this time?

How will we create space to rebuild relationships, mindful of social distancing both within and outside? What strategies will support repairing relationships?

A focus on Engagement

Engagement in our own health and well-being and with the issues that affect us: our learning and community and living out our values.

What is engagement? Engagement means 'to participate, to take action'. Much like many of the other RESTORE themes, this will be different for all of us.

Why is engagement important now? Quaker communities will of course wish to return to some kind of normality and inevitably there will be a drive to return to routines of the past. This is unsurprising, as those structures and routines are the very things that keep Meetings safe providing both physical and spiritual containment.

But before we jump back into those routines it is going to be essential to engage with the whole community and allow people to share their stories. Without a period of recognition and understanding the 'now' – enabling all people to feel heard will be almost impossible.

And Quakers face calls for learning and action in three important areas: our anti-racist work, our welcoming of diverse groups of people, and our response to the Climate Emergency. Individuals may find engaging with these topics demands an energy that they lack.

Questions

How can we engage with all Friends? What is the best way to listen and to encourage ourselves?

What are we called to engage with, as individuals and as meetings? Are we willing to take risks as a Meetings and live adventurously?

How can we promote our community engagement with the wider Quaker community (Area Meeting ... the whole of BYM)?

How can we ensure that we are truly welcoming to diverse people, not just "people like us": sensitive to individual Friends circumstances, cultural backgrounds and additional needs?