

# All are welcome



## Growing our all-age community

Advices and queries for Friends who have responsibility for eldership and oversight

- Reach out to families
- Connect with each other
- Enrich our all-age worshipping community

## Introduction

“The Religious Society of Friends is organised into local meetings, each of which should be a community” (*Quaker faith & practice* 10.03). We are reminded in *Advices & queries* 24 that “Children and young people need love and stability”. It goes on to ask “Are we doing all we can to uphold and sustain parents and others who carry responsibility for providing this care?” *Advices & queries* 19 encourages us to “rejoice in the presence of children and young people, and recognise their gifts” and asks “Are you ready to learn from them and to accept your responsibilities towards them?”

*Our faith in the future*, the vision agreed in 2015, includes “In turbulent times, Quakers in Britain

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seek a future where Quaker communities are loving, inclusive and all age. All are heard, valued and supported both in our needs and our leadings. Everyone's contribution is accepted according to their gifts and resources. All are welcomed and included. There are clear and effective ways of working together on shared concerns. Fellowship and fun strengthen the bonds between us, enhancing a loving community".

Quaker Life has worked with Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre and Friends of all ages to develop the following nine new advices and queries for meetings.

Please use this resource to explore what is happening in your meeting, and consider how

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you can develop as an all-age worshipping community. Are there opportunities to reach out to families, connect with each other and enrich our worshipping all-age community?

You could choose a different advice to reflect on at each meeting of elders and overseers, or at local meetings for worship for business. You could also set up discussion and study groups. Share your thoughts and work with others on what activities you might do.

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Do we receive children, young people, parents and carers into meeting for worship in the same way that we receive all ministry, recognising that all need and cherish their spiritual place?

1

We listen to each other in the stillness of worship. We may also provide opportunity for regular worship for all ages where there is shared silence and active reflection. Do we understand there are different paths towards greater spiritual understanding within our community?

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## **What might this look like for your meeting?**

Meeting considers how it may be ready for children.

All meetings are ready for children with at least two appropriately checked helpers, who enjoy being with children.

Meeting has a selection of modern and relevant books and resources of interest to children, and provides access to *Journeys in the Spirit*.

Regular worship for all ages is held.

Children and young people are encouraged to take some responsibilities in meeting e.g. welcoming, reading notices or being an elder.

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**Are our hearts and minds open to the children, young people and families who come to our meeting, knowing that each person is an individual?**

**2**

Do we consider all are equal, regardless of age and life experience? What opportunities do we have to learn as an all-age community, building friendship, and trust across generations? How can we work together with those who provide children's meeting, and not relinquish this responsibility to parents and carers?

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## **What might this look like for your meeting?**

Those who aren't parents and carers of children and young people are involved in children's meeting.

Links are made between children and young people's helpers, clerks and elders and overseers to learn from each other.

Elders and overseers consider the needs and gifts of each person within a family.

Children, young people, parents and carers are welcomed and encouraged to meet with other members of the meeting in informal groups both in and out of meeting for worship.

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How do we enable our children, young people and their families to learn about our Quaker and Christian heritage; our traditions, concerns, ideas and beliefs?

3

We have a faith and tradition that guides our life and actions. How do we work together to ensure that the resources and rich experiences we can offer our families are made known to them?

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## **What might this look like for your meeting?**

Use is made of the wide range of all-age learning resources in *Being Friends Together*.

Learning groups, e.g. Becoming Friends, are arranged in ways and at times that parents/carers can attend.

Children and young people's helpers are confident in providing children's meetings that include Quaker history and traditions and understand Quaker values and testimonies.

Visits to Friends House, Woodbrooke and Swarthmoor Hall are offered or arranged with bursary support as needed.

Young people are encouraged to form and attend link groups.

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Do we find the courage and time to counter a culture of suspicion, be open to building trusting relationships through shared activities, and so share a spiritual path with children, young people and their families?

4

We seek to share our faith and accompany children, young people and families in their life journeys. To whom can they turn when challenged, hurt and afraid, knowing that their privacy is respected? Does our fear block their path to us?

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## **What might this look like for your meeting?**

Adults are encouraged to have conversations directly with children and get to know them in safe, sociable settings such as shared lunches.

There are opportunities for away days and weekends that include people of all ages, and involve children and young people in planning.

Young people have opportunity to choose a different overseer from their parents. Overseers and others send birthday cards to children, and perhaps offer child care. Meeting keeps in contact with young people leaving home and, if wanted, links them to a meeting in their new home.

Safeguarding is seen as part of caring for one another and not as a barrier to including children in our communities.

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How do we encourage children, young people and their families to consider ways in which their Quaker faith, our shared testimony and practice can support and strengthen them in their lives?

5

Friends have a strong faith tradition that has adapted and grown throughout history. We derive strength and comfort from this, as well as the courage to live adventurously and discern new opportunities and ways. Our Quaker faith and practices give guidance and encouragement to us in our lives and in our wider communities. They are the roots for making our Quaker values active in the world. We may look into our local communities and consider what is needed and what we can do.

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## **What might this look like for your meeting?**

Meetings find informal ways for exchange between children and adults about how they put their faith into action in the world individually and collectively.

Groups and committees are held at family friendly times, and places.

Meetings are open to new ways of working and being with one another, perhaps changing old habits and building new traditions.

Meetings engage with their local (non-Quaker) family community e.g. providing parent and toddler groups, input to schools, foodbanks and other community schemes.

Speakers are provided for peace education or interfaith elements of the school curriculum.

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How do we listen, hear and talk with the children, young people and their families in our meeting, and nurture their gifts and talents?

6

Quaker communities are a place where children, young people and their families are nurtured so that they can trust and share their hopes and happiness as well as their times of bleakness, sorrow, doubt or shame.

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## **What might this look like for your meeting?**

Adults, children and young people have opportunities to gather and get to know each other in social activities, such as shared meals, picnics, providing biscuits and drinks at meeting.

Children and young people's writing or art work is included in local/area newsletters and websites.

Young Friends are encouraged to meet socially in Friends' homes, or attend national young Quaker events, even if not attending local meeting for worship.

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How do we ensure we are open to the opportunities and challenges of change, for the new ways and energies that families bring?

7

Family structures are changing and we welcome those who are parents, carers or family members and may not live with the children and young people that come with them to meeting. There are many pressures on all of us, and meeting offers both a sanctuary and a place of strength to nurture and support us in difficult times and situations; to know one another in the things that are eternal.

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## **What might this look like for your meeting?**

Overseers and elders know parents and carers and can listen sensitively, providing the best-possible support in times of change or bereavement.

Individual difficulties and concerns are held confidentially, unless there is a safeguarding concern.

Meeting understands that parents and carers may not be able to undertake roles and responsibilities, though they are offered to them.

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**How well do local and area meetings know – and use – the resources available to welcome families into our meetings?**

8

Finding and joining our Quaker faith community may be a joyful discovery or a painful experience of not belonging. We continue to develop and share our Quaker values, making positive use of relevant media and learning to reach out more widely, and find ways to include those who share our values and beliefs.

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## **What might this look like for your meeting?**

Websites provide information about meetings, including what to expect in worship, and in children and young people's meetings.

Young people are involved in website development.

There are links to national children and young people's opportunities beyond the area meeting.

Support is given for social media groups for young Friends, which enables everyone to be included. Overseers and others are aware of the opportunities open to children and young people and young Friends.

Young Friends share their experiences of Quaker events with children.

There is active engagement between area children's advocates and meetings.

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How do the places and spaces we make for children, young people and families in our meeting demonstrate our commitment to their welcome, care and nurture, in fulfilment of our responsibilities to them?

9

Our meeting houses or meeting rooms are varied in the space they provide. We seek to be active in our communities, using our meeting houses as a place for the wider community to gather. Do we allow our concerns for outreach, or financial security, to deafen us to a priority for our Quaker all-age community?

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## What might this look like for your meeting?

Buildings have spaces for children and families on a regular basis.

Children and young peoples' views inform how a space is decorated and furnished.

Consideration is given to Friends' need for space in preference to a hirer of a room.

Partnerships with other faith groups or organisations provide space for children's groups and all-age activities.

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## **Websites and further resources**

**For information about courses, events and training for Friends including opportunities for families:**

[www.woodbrooke.org.uk](http://www.woodbrooke.org.uk)

[www.swarthmoorhall.co.uk](http://www.swarthmoorhall.co.uk)

**In addition, there are resources, ideas and support for Outreach at:**

[www.quaker.org.uk/resources/free-resources/outreach-materials](http://www.quaker.org.uk/resources/free-resources/outreach-materials)

**For learning resources, including working with all ages:** <http://together.woodbrooke.org.uk>

**For young Quakers:**

[www.yqspace.org.uk](http://www.yqspace.org.uk)

**For Quaker parents:**

[www.quaker.org.uk/quakerparent](http://www.quaker.org.uk/quakerparent)

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**For children and young people's work resources, events and training:**

[www.quaker.org.uk/cyp-children](http://www.quaker.org.uk/cyp-children)

[www.quaker.org.uk/cyp-youth](http://www.quaker.org.uk/cyp-youth)

[www.quaker.org.uk/cyp-all-ages](http://www.quaker.org.uk/cyp-all-ages)

[www.quaker.org.uk/cyp-events](http://www.quaker.org.uk/cyp-events)

[www.quaker.org.uk/cypconferences](http://www.quaker.org.uk/cypconferences)

[www.quaker.org.uk/cyp-policies-procedures](http://www.quaker.org.uk/cyp-policies-procedures)

**Quaker Life offers a range of support and guidance for role holders in meetings, including workshops for elders and overseers. You can find out more about this by visiting:**

[www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/support-for-meetings](http://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/support-for-meetings)

**For information on Quaker summer events:**

[www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/book-of-meetings/organisations](http://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/book-of-meetings/organisations)

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If you would like to explore how these advices and queries can aid your meeting to build an all age community, please see [www.quaker.org.uk/cyptraining](http://www.quaker.org.uk/cyptraining) where you can request a visit from two Friends to provide group facilitation events or training workshops.

Britain Yearly Meeting and Woodbrooke  
working in partnership

