Care When talking about Reparation

Purpose and Intent

This guidance is for those engaging in reparation work, particularly: those holding spaces and conversations on reparation, Quaker communities and staff engaging in this work, those navigating the emotional, spiritual, and relational impact of reparation work.

These guidelines set out how we can practice thoughtful, sustained, and collective care for all those engaged in Reparation work they come from our experience and perspectives. They are not exhaustive. Reparation work necessarily engages with histories and present realities of extreme harm, violence, racism, and dispossession. It unites the histories of perpetrators and victims previously separated. We recognise that this work carries embodied burdens for those living within the ongoing legacies of the trafficking of Africans across the Atlantic, colonialism, and systemic racism.

This guidance exists to ensure that care is shared and collective, harm is not reproduced within the work, the burden of the emotional labour is not disproportionally placed on those most affected by racism.

Care is integral aspect of reparation work. Care is decolonial.

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Why This Guidance Is Needed?

1. The Emotional and Psychological Toll

Engaging with histories of African chattel enslavement can involve repeated exposure to:

- Accounts of violence inflicted on Black and Brown bodies
- Dehumanising language and beliefs used to justify enslavement
- Forced labour systems and intergenerational trauma
- Dispossession of land; degradation culture, and identity
- Failure to live up to stated belief and spiritual values

For many, these are not distant histories. They are lived, inherited, reimagined, and ongoing. Discussing this can reopen wounds that never fully healed. This grief is an additional burden that can make reparation work for those living with the legacies of enslavement profoundly taxing.

2. Spiritual and Moral Harm

Within faith communities there can be a deep pain when confronting institutional complicity.

For example, many Quakers:

- Held and trafficked enslaved people
- Invested in companies profiting from enslaved labour
- Benefited from goods produced under violent conditions

It can be deeply distressing, particularly given Quakers' reputation for radical moral leadership. While figures such as Benjamin Lay and early Germantown Friends resisted enslavement, many were complicit in the trafficking of Africans across the Atlantic**.**

3. The Burden of Resistance and Justification

Black and Brown participants are often placed in positions where they must:

- Justify the legitimacy of reparation
- Respond to questions on whether racism "was really that bad" or "still exists"
- Explain basic realities of racism to sceptical or defensive audiences

This labour can be exhausting, undervalued, unremunerated, and unsafe. Conversations can quickly shift from history to the present, for example on the bias, inequality, and discrimination people are navigating now, making emotional distance difficult.

4. Emotional Exhaustion and Representation Fatigue

Black and Brown people may feel pressure to represent their communities' pain, needs, and demands. This "representation fatigue" is compounded by:

- Fear of backlash or being labelled "angry," "divisive," or "too sensitive"
- Being dismissed or misunderstood
- The assumption that Black and Brown people must always have answers

This creates additional emotional strain

Core Principles

- Care is collective, not individualised. It is reciprocal and for all. This is one way in which we can better care for our community.
- The burden of education or emotional labour must not sit with those who are most impacted by racism.
- Discomfort is necessary for growth, but harm is not.
- Grief, anger, and exhaustion are legitimate responses, not problems to be fixed.
- Care is a practice of justice and a decolonial act
- Care is not separate from reparation work. It is how the work becomes possible.

Ubuntu philosophy reminds us: *people thrive when their humanity is centred and belonging is cultivated.*

How do we practice care?

Shared responsibility for care:

Care is not just the role of those holding the conversations, and carrying our reparative work. It is a collective responsibility.

Participants, Facilitators and Organisations are collectively responsible for :

- holding structure, boundaries, and safety
- practising self-awareness, accountability, and care for others
- providing resources and support.

We all actively:

- Interrupt harmful dynamics when they arise
- Share responsibility for holding the space
- Ensure no one person carries disproportionate emotional labour

What this looks like in practice:

- We prepare together for difficult conversations
- We do not rely on Black and Brown people or participants to educate others
- We name and interrupt harm when it occurs.
- We recognise power dynamics and respond to them. Recognising that:
    - Speaking up carries different risks depending on identity and context
    - Some voices are more easily dismissed than others
    - We all ask**:** Who is being heard, and who is not?
- We create conditions where people can engage without being retraumatised, without reinforcing power dynamics
- We are unapologetic in our rejection of all forms of hate

Before Sessions (Preparation)

For those holding conversations:

- Clearly communicate the purpose and emotional nature of the space
- Share expectations and topics in advance
- Provide optional pre-reading or grounding materials where appropriate
- Prepare for predictable resistance and emotional responses
    - Examples of helpful framing: *"I don't think you meant harm, but that landed this way…"*
- Agree co-facilitation and support roles such as Elders where possible/required
- Plan debriefs after sessions

During Meetings/Sessions

1. **Attend to Impact, not just Intent**
    - If something lands uncomfortably, do not assume harm was intended. You can still acknowledge and attend to the impact.
2. **Practise awareness of others and power dynamics**
    - What is being discussed may be distressing or difficult in different ways for individuals.
    - While well intended questions are encouraged they should be gentle and rooted in care
3. **Respect Confidentiality**
    - Share experiences rather than identifiable information.
    - What is said within the meeting is said in the spirit of trust and confidence, specific information about what individuals said need not be taken out of the group.
4. **Take shared responsibility for the space and engage with bravery and care**
    - All participants share responsibility for their own safety and the safety of others.

- We recognise that that we are all on a journey of unlearning and relearning
- We enter discussions with bravery, and hold awareness that others are being brave.
- We gently welcome and sit with the uncertainty and discomfort of healing and repair
- We recognise that our capacity to grow is a commonality we all share

Embedding Care in the Session

The following prompts may be utilised to support embedding care in sessions:

Opening prompts:

- How are you arriving today?
- What do you need from this space to support openness?

Reflective questions to offer participants:

- What am I able to offer this space?
- What am I protecting myself from?
- What am I not seeing?
- What discomfort am I able to stay with?
- What power dynamics are present?

Body awareness:

- What is happening in my body right now?
- What support do I need to stay present?

Making Space for Grief

“Grief is a catalyst that provides the space for us to say: this must change.”
— Lena Thibeh

Grief may arise, especially for those living within the legacies of enslavement. It must be allowed, and respected, not rushed or “fixed.”

Support it by:

- Pausing discussion and holding silence
- Allowing emotion, including tears, without interruption
- Offering apologies where appropriate-without expecting immediate resolution

Practices may include:

- Silence or reflection
- Acknowledgment of ancestors

Holding Tension and Disagreement

- Harm can occur even without malicious intent.
- Naming impact is essential

Those holding the conversations should:

- Acknowledge the harm
- Take breaks where needed
- Be mindful of power and whose voices are heard

We actively ensure:

- Black and Brown participants are not isolated or expected to represent others

After Meetings

We commit to:

- Debriefs and reflection spaces
- Spaces for processing emotional impact
- Peer support

These spaces help us:

- Release tension
- Reflect and learn
- Resource and sustain our engagement

When Researching

Researchers may come across upsetting language, or graphic and emotionally challenging content. These again may have different impacts for different people. Those commissioning research are asked to:

- Ensure that breaks are taken when needed, especially when engaging with difficult or distressing material.
- If needed seek support from a trusted elder or colleague to process the difficulties of what is being encountered.
- Approach this work with awareness that the content may be graphic or emotionally challenging.
    - Check in with yourself: *Am I able to hold the weight of this today?* If not, consider whether this task can be scheduled for a time when you have greater capacity.

Ongoing Care and Sustainability

Sustainable engagement with reparation and work related to racial and social injustice requires collective care embedded within organisational culture.

Key practices include:

- Peer support networks and emotional validation
- Setting boundaries and rest
- Physical movement and embodied approaches
- Access to trusted Elders and Reparation Working Group members
- Opportunities for retreat and reflection
- Reminding ourselves of incremental change and cultivating joy

Building into how we want to wind up the group/ending and laying down the work

-making space for new relationship, not grief, not ‘celebration’, memorialisation

Reparation work requires emotional, intellectual, embodied and spiritual engagement.

We affirm that:

- Care is shared
- Pursuing justice without paying attention to the importance of care reproduces harm

Practices for sustaining care and resilience:

Below are some suggested practices for sustaining care. They can be used by those holding conversations to support participants to practice self-awareness, accountability, and care for others. They are also useful tools to ground oneself in resilience.

Arrival

- Grounding breathwork
- Prompt: *How am I arriving today?*

Regulation During Sessions

- Pause or silence
- Body check-in: *What is happening for me right now?*

Reflection

Choose 1–2 questions:

- What am I protecting myself from?

- What am I not yet seeing?
- What discomfort can I stay with?

Collective Care Practice

- Pair or group listening
- Witnessing without interruption

Resilience resourcing

Prompt: *What resource can I use to support my ability to stay in discomfort/support my ability to continue with challenging work?*

- Being with ancestors, elders, or community
- Music, Artwork, Poetry, Worship or Prayer
- Accessing nature or the elements (earth, water, fire, air)

Movement Practice

- Walking, stretching, dancing, or shaking to release tension in the body

Closing

- One-word check-out
- Gratitude or intention

Further Resources to Support with Care

To read:

- *Healing Justice Lineages: Dreaming at the Crossroads of Liberation, Collective Care, and Safety* – Cara Page and Erica Woodland
- *White Work and Reparative Genealogy: Reckoning with Ancestral Debt as a Path to Racial Reparations* – Mary Watkins
- *Recovering Racists: Dismantling White Supremacy and Reclaiming our Humanity*- Idelette McVicker
- *Resources from Holding Emotions:*
    - Holding Emotions | London Museum
    - Holding-Emotions-resource-leaflet.pdf
- Resources - The Resilience Project (related to climate anxiety but still useful.)

- *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*- Resmaa Menaken
- *The Racial Healing Handbook*, Anneliese A. Singh
- *Mindful of Race: Transforming racism from the Inside Out,* Ruth King
- Doing nothing is the most important thing my Black body can do for racial justice | by Kelsey Blackwell | Age of Awareness | Medium
- The Arrow | The Movement Within the Movement

To listen:

- Ruby Savage | Deep Listening Set: Piano, Harp & Spiritual Jazz | Grounded 031 - YouTube
- Entek | Deep Listening Set: Qi Gong, Ambient | Grounded 016
- Space Afrika - Somewhere Decent To Live
- Albany State University 2014 Poetry Festival Nikki Giovanni - "Ego Tripping"
- Nina Simone - Feeling Good (Official Video)

To watch:

- The Power of Somatics for Collective Transformation, Healing Justice Ldn
- *How to Have Antiracist Conversations w/ Dr. Roxy Manning*

This is not a fixed document. We expect this document to grow through continued listening and learning, particularly from people living with the enduring legacies of enslavement and colonialism. We therefore welcome additions and reflections. Contributions will help ensure that this guidance remains a useful, respectful, and evolving resource, rooted in care, and a commitment to reparatory justice.