



# Engaging with schools

## Outreach with children and young people

A core aspect of most Religious Education (RE) curriculums involves finding out about faith communities and religious buildings. As a result, local schools often want to visit Quaker meeting houses to find out about our worship, our history and our way of life, as well as explore our place of worship. This can be an ideal opportunity for outreach and to make connections with the local community.

This resource has been created to support Friends and Quaker meetings working with schools and other groups of children and young people visiting the meeting house. It also contains ideas for talks, discussions and sessions for anyone visiting a school or other group.

There are ideas and suggestions about how to plan and prepare, welcome and hospitality, and the kinds of subjects and ideas you might want to cover.



## Planning your session

It is always important to plan any activity well and to think about what you want to achieve. It is helpful to think about the amount of time you have and to try to get a good balance between listening and conversation, talking about Quakers and some activity. It is also good to think about hospitality and about how you will make your visitors feel welcome. If there are children or young people in, or connected with, your meeting, try to involve them in the planning and preparation of the event. Invite them to be part of a planning group and ask them what they would find interesting and helpful.

A visit from a group of children or young people – or a visit to a school – can be an opportunity to share something about Quaker life and faith. But, just as importantly, it can also be a chance to hear their stories, insights and experiences – a space to share something of their own journeys and the values and beliefs that shape their lives.

Make sure there is ample space for the children and young people to speak and ask questions, and be open to the light and insights they will bring.

It is also important to remember that not all children will feel comfortable or find it easy talking about these things, so try to find helpful questions and ways in that encourage them to speak in their own way (see 'Wondering questions' below).

Here's a brief checklist to help you plan your session:

- Have we been invited to visit a school or asked to host a visit?
- What type of event do we want to run? What is it we want to do?
- What about hospitality? Will we offer refreshments? (If at all possible, the answer should be yes!)
- What format will it take? How can we make it interactive and engaging?
- What ages is it aimed at? How old are the visiting students?
- If it is our own outreach event, have we planned it for a time when children and young people from the meeting can come?
- Who else in the meeting could be involved in planning and delivering the session?
- Will we ask Friends to speak? If so, do the people we've asked to speak reflect the diversity of Friends in our meeting? Have we asked young people from our meeting to talk about their Quaker experience?
- Are we hosting a group? If so, how can we make the space we are using comfortable and welcoming?

### Wondering questions

Often the most effective way to engage with children and young people is to ask 'wondering' questions. Try to begin your questions with "I wonder...":

- "I wonder what is really important in your life."
- "I wonder what makes you happy."
- "I wonder what makes you feel peaceful and calm."
- "I wonder if you sometimes see things that make you angry."

At the end of a session, you might ask:

- "I wonder how it felt when you were very still and quiet."
- "I wonder what seemed most difficult about today."
- "I wonder what you will take away and think about."

## Things to remember

### Safeguarding

Some members of your meeting may already have current DBS checks, but to follow good practice guidelines no adult should be alone, even with a group of children. Working in pairs is good practice and means that you are supported. If a school group is visiting your meeting house, make sure it has an appropriate number of teachers and teaching assistants, or parents. For further advice visit [www.quaker.org.uk/children-and-young-people/work-quaker-setting/policies-procedures](http://www.quaker.org.uk/children-and-young-people/work-quaker-setting/policies-procedures) or contact [safe@quaker.org.uk](mailto:safe@quaker.org.uk).

### Tone, language and activity

Whatever activities you decide to do and whether you are hosting or visiting, there are a few things it is helpful to remember:

Most children – like most adults – learn most effectively by doing rather than listening, so try to build plenty of activity into the session. It might be creative, it might be exploring the meeting house, it might be conversation, or it might be settling and finding stillness. Any of these activities will be remembered long after the words we use have faded.

An event with a group of children or young people should involve as much listening as it does talking. As well as talking about Quaker values, ask about what they value and what is important to them. As well as talking about Quaker worship, ask them about being still and quiet and what it's like. Being asked – and really listened to – will be enriching and affirming and will help them be more open to what you might want to say to them.

In all that you say, and with all that is said, it is important to be positive. Talk about Quaker beliefs and values in the positive. It is more helpful to say that we work positively for peace, justice and equality than to say that we are against war and inequality; positive examples and stories are also good. The same is true when talking about our faith and others; it's never a good thing to be disparaging about other traditions. Talk instead about the particular insights of our own – the Light in every person; listening and waiting in stillness; being open to new light.

Avoid at all costs any Quaker jargon. This is easier said than done, but words like elder or overseer; testimony, witness or concern (in the way we use these as Quakers), and even meeting for worship, will mean little or nothing to the children you are speaking to.

Quakerism is about more than its history; it is fundamentally about the transformation of ordinary lives, of people like us. It can be interesting to talk about chocolate or prison reform, but the real story is what being a Quaker means to you. It's helpful to have other people from the meeting – preferably young people – talking about how being a Quaker shapes the way they live.

Keeping the tone light and suggesting that being a Quaker might be an enjoyable as well as a valuable thing to be is helpful and attractive.

If at all possible, give them food. It's good to be remembered as the cheerful, kind people who gave them juice and nice biscuits!

## Ideas for activities

It is important when arranging the visit to try to get a sense of what the focus might be. Do they want to find out about the meeting house? Or about living out Quaker values? Or about Quaker worship? Overleaf you can find some activities that focus on each of these aspects.

The children may want to explore all of these things, in which case you could choose one or two activities from each section. The number you choose will ultimately depend on how much time and space you have, and on how many people are available to help you.

## Living our values

### 1) What are values? (7+ years)

Resources needed: a copy of the table of Quaker values for each child or group of children; paper; pens or pencils for each child; sticky dots.

Ask if anybody knows what values are. You could explain that just as we all have possessions that are important to us, we also have beliefs about the right way to do things, which are important to us too. Sometimes, groups of people such as families, schools or clubs have some shared values. These might include everyone taking their turn or being kind to one another.

Before thinking about Quaker values, it is important to hear about the values the children or young people have. To enable them to share these, give each child a piece of paper and ask them to write or draw the value that is most important to them. Then ask them to fold their piece of paper, collect these in a basket and mix them up. The basket can then be passed around for everyone to choose one note to read out. Make it clear that no one has to read if they do not want to, but make sure that everyone's note is read aloud by asking for volunteers to read more than one if needed.

Give the children a copy of the table below (one per child, one per small group or a large version on a flip chart for the entire group). Ask them to mark one of the three columns with a cross or a sticky dot to show whether they agree, sometimes agree or disagree with each statement. Allow enough time and space for each child or young person to make their own decision about each value without being influenced by others.

Afterwards, you might talk about:

- How similar or different are our values?
- Are there any values you strongly agree with, but which are difficult to stick to?
- Do other people always treat you equally?
- How often do we buy something because everyone else has one, rather than because we really need it? What sorts of things can we enjoy for free? Examples might include the countryside, library books or being with friends.
- What sorts of things can we do to take care of the planet?

Quaker values	Agree	Sometimes agree	Disagree
Fighting is wrong.			
Telling the truth is important.			
Everyone should be treated equally.			
We should only buy the things we really need.			
We should take care of the planet.			

## 2) Advices & queries (6+ years)

Tell the children that Quakers have a booklet called *Advices & queries*, which helps them to think about their values and how they should live. It contains 42 pieces of advice. Let's see what the children think about some of them.

- Designate one end of the room as 'agree', the other as 'disagree' and the middle a continuum between the two.
  - Now read aloud some of the advices and queries below in turn, asking the children to arrange themselves according to how they feel about each one. Choose those you think will be appropriate to their age and interest them most. Be prepared to explain what they mean if asked.
  - If appropriate, particularly if only one or two people are in one part of the room, ask them to explain why they have chosen that spot.
- If anything surprises you, again, ask members of the group to explain their position to everyone else. Alternatively, ask them to talk to the nearest people about why they are there.

Afterwards, you might talk about:

- How easy is it to be influenced by what the people around us choose to do?
- Is it important to make decisions about values for ourselves, or is it okay to be influenced by other people? Why?
- How can we respect other people's values as well as our own?

**Be honest, truthful and open.**

**War is bad. No long-term good ever comes from it.**

**Don't just live in your own little bubble; there's a big world out there.**

**Don't give in to peer pressure.**

**Talk about your beliefs and put them into action.**

**Try to live simply.**

**Enjoy silence.**

**Don't worry about getting old.**

**Children and young people are great; look after them and learn from them.**

**Be careful with drugs and alcohol.**

**Look after the world for the future. Reduce, reuse and recycle.**

**Appreciate your family.**

**Live adventurously.**

**Relationships take time and effort. Talk!**

**You're not always right; listen to others.**

**Be welcoming to everyone. We've all got stuff going on, don't judge a book by its cover.**

**Don't be disrespectful or judgemental. Embrace diversity.**

**Value worship, by yourself or with others.**

**Sometimes breaking the law is necessary. But think about it and get some advice first.**

(A selection of advices and queries compiled by young Quakers. These appear in the book *Living our beliefs: an exploration of the faith and practice of Quakers*.)

### 3) Let's explore the Quaker way (up to 8 years)

Resources needed: pencils, crayons, felt-tip pens, and paper. *Let's explore the Quaker way* can be ordered from CYP ([cypadmin@quaker.org.uk](mailto:cypadmin@quaker.org.uk)).

Tell the children that you are going to read *Let's explore the Quaker way*, which was written to help children understand some values that Quakers find especially important. When you have finished reading the book, return to the first illustration of everyone in meeting for worship. Talk about how the artist, when she created this picture, wanted to show how each person has a different type of light source and how that would show that although all Quakers are different and have different ideas of God, they can all link together.

Ask the children some 'wondering' questions about how they might see the light within them. You could ask:

- "I wonder what you think your light might look like."
- "I wonder why you see it like that."
- "I wonder if your light is bold, bright, soft, gentle or something else."

Then invite the children to create their own picture to show how they see that light.

### 4) Being a Quaker (all ages)

Ask two or three people from your meeting to talk for a few minutes about:

- what being a Quaker means to them
- why they are a Quaker
- what they like about being a Quaker
- what is important to them about being a Quaker
- what they believe.

Think very carefully about timing – up to three minutes each for two or three people is plenty. Ask a range of people. They will need to be engaging in order to hold the children's attention, even for a short time. If they would like to and it can be arranged, ask children or young people from your meeting to speak. Their school may give them time off to do it as part of their experience and development. Follow this with a time for questions from the children.

## Exploring the meeting house

### 1) Meeting house trail (all ages)

Resources needed: pencils, colouring pens and crayons, plain and coloured paper, collage materials, glue sticks and safety scissors.

Identify which parts of the meeting house you want to take people to. Start with the meeting room and explain that this is where Quakers worship. You may want to make sure that *Quaker faith & practice* and the Bible are on the table. Perhaps also some flowers.

Encourage people to absorb their surroundings and then ask how it feels to be in this room, for example peaceful, calm, quiet. Continue to other rooms such as the children's room or the library and again ensure there are suitable books, pictures on the walls, maybe some craft materials for people to write or draw their thoughts.

### 2) Meeting house quiz (all ages)

You could devise a quiz about your meeting house or a worksheet about the different places the children will go to.



## Quaker worship and stillness

### 1) Quaker meeting and me (up to 8 years)

Resources needed: pencils, crayons, felt-tip pens, paper.  
*Quaker meeting and me* is available from CYP  
(cypadmin@quaker.org.uk).

Tell the children you are going to read *Quaker meeting and me*, which was written to help children understand what might happen during a Quaker meeting for worship. Let them know that you will pause between each page and that there are some questions in the book they might like to think about during these pauses.

When you have finished reading, use the questions in the book to wonder with the children. For example, "I wonder what you could hear inside the room?" or "I wonder what God is like in you?" If you have time, encourage the children to share with the group any thoughts they might have about the book. The following 'stilling' exercise is particularly useful for younger children or those who are not used to silence:

- Sit back in your chair so that your back is right up against the back of the chair.
- Put both feet flat on the floor (you may need to get lower or higher chairs for some children, or put a box or some books under their feet).
- Place your hands in a cup-like position in your lap, or let them lie loosely on your knees.
- Give your shoulders a shrug to make sure they are relaxed, even though you are sitting upright.

- Now that you are in an alert and relaxed position, see if you can let your eyelids close very gently... while I count three (then count five, then ten)
- I wonder whether we can breathe in for four and out for four; in and out through the nose. In 2 3 4, out 2 3 4. Now breathe slowly by yourself without counting.
- I wonder whether we can put all of these things together:
- Can we sit alert and relaxed...with our eyes gently closed...breathing slowly and gently...until I ask you to stop?

Let the children know how you will signal the end of this exercise. Afterwards, pause for a few moments. Using questions like these, ask the children what this period of quiet worship felt like:

- What did you think about?
- How did you feel?
- Perhaps you felt calm or quiet or filled with love.
- Perhaps you had some sad thoughts.
- You may have had pictures in your head.
- In Quaker meeting people sometimes talk about these feelings and pictures while others listen carefully. This is called ministry.

Now using the materials provided, invite the children to write a few words about or draw a picture of their thoughts and feelings. Let them know that they are welcome to share what they have done. They may prefer to keep their thoughts to themselves, and that's fine.

### 2) Silent thoughts and feelings (all ages)

Ask if anyone has been or goes to a church, temple, mosque or synagogue. Acknowledge any responses. Say that Quakers are a bit different from people who go to these places of worship because we worship together in quiet and stillness. This is a time to think about God, to listen to God and to feel God. We sit together,

sharing quiet and stillness with others. Some people pray, some think about things or problems, some read from a special book like the Bible or a Quaker book. Gradually, people become very still and relaxed. Ask someone from your meeting to talk about what they do in meeting for worship. Tell the children that you will now spend some time in silence and that when this happens in a Quaker meeting it is called worship.

## Review

It is important to take some time to get together and review the session afterwards. It might be helpful to ask:

- what do you feel went well today?
- which activities did the children enjoy?
- what would you do differently next time?

## Resources

Britain Yearly Meeting's Children & Young People's staff team has developed a range of resources. These offer ideas and activities to support children's meetings and other engagement with Quaker children.

Visit [www.quaker.org.uk/cyp](http://www.quaker.org.uk/cyp) for a full list.

Download our catalogue at [www.quaker.org.uk/documents/cyp-resources-leaflet-web](http://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/cyp-resources-leaflet-web).

*Journeys in the Spirit* is a monthly publication for people working with children and young people. The children's edition provides materials for adult Quakers working with children aged 5 to 12. It can help with Quaker meetings, all-age events, residential gatherings and camps. It is free by subscription and you can receive a paper copy or be emailed a link to an online version.

Subscribe at [www.quaker.org.uk/journeyschildren](http://www.quaker.org.uk/journeyschildren).

For a paper copy of this leaflet or for more information please email the CYP Administrator at [cypadmin@quaker.org.uk](mailto:cypadmin@quaker.org.uk) or phone 020 7663 1013. It was produced in July 2018 by Quaker Life, and written by Alistair Fuller, Melanie Cook, Howard Nurden, Madeleine Harding, and Kathy Chandler.

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