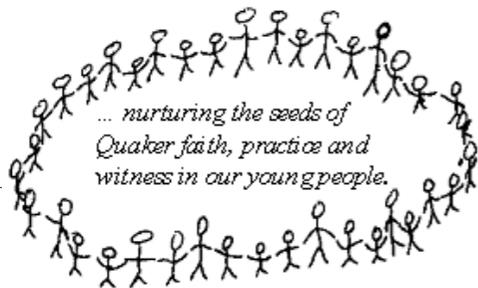


Nurturing Children in Small Meetings

The intimacy of a small Meeting offers an abundance of opportunities for children to grow in the loving care of the whole Meeting. The children are always in the sight of all of the adults in the Meeting. They can be known and loved for who they are by their whole Meeting family. There are certainly challenges, but all Meetings have challenges of one kind or another. With the determination and commitment of the whole Meeting community, their children may be well nurtured in a variety of ways along their spiritual journey—which is really the point, regardless of the size of the community.



This pamphlet was created with the input of the Children's Spiritual Life Committee and Friends from smaller Meetings, exploring the topic in workshops.

QUERIES

- ✎ In what ways does the Meeting support children's seeking God's will and acting upon their understanding of Truth?
- ✎ Does the Meeting allow it's fears about its size shape its beliefs about what it has to offer children?
- ✎ What does the Meeting want most for its children?



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Support for Families
and Meetings in
their care of children

Nurturing Quaker Children in a Small Meeting

Children in a Small Meeting

From the child's point of view, living in a small Meeting can be a very rich life. The segregation between children and adults that is the norm for popular culture and many large Meetings is impossible here. It is like living in a small town, or a large family where everyone knows and loves you and has a sense of responsibility toward you.

WORSHIP

From the children's point of view, **worship in the manner of Friends is about the hardest part of being a Quaker.** Children are quite capable of living from a place of connection with that which is Holy. Sitting still, on the other hand, is just hard. Children need to learn by experience what Meeting for Worship is about. The higher ratio of adults in a small Meeting with few children means that there are more Friends entering into a deep centered space, creating the worshipful atmosphere that is noticeable to children, This is what will teach them about the power and meaning of Meeting for Worship. While there is no denying the power that can be felt in a large gathered Meeting, **Friends in small Meetings know the power their intimacy can have.** This power of intimacy is as true for children as for adults.

RELATIONSHIPS

From the children's point of view, **a small Meeting has the same benefits as a small town: everyone knows who they are!** Each adult can know each child's name. Even more, they can know the children's dispositions and interests. The children can be cherished as individuals, by the whole community. This is a gift.



In a small Meeting, if every adult commits to going to one game, recital or event in one Meeting child's life each year, **each child will feel their Meeting Family's presence in their lives.** This becomes even more important when the children are the only Quaker in their schools and activities.

QUAKER COMMUNITY

From the children's point of view, **peacework, community service and other forms of activism can be an integral** part of what it means to be a member of Quaker community. The kids can be part of the Meeting's service activities, around the edges or in the thick of it. Including children means bringing the few along and putting them to work because their energy helps to pull it off and the high adult:child ratio makes it safe. Additionally the leading or idea of a child who is known by all the adults can be heard more easily.

For children, **FUN is an essential part of community** and sometimes the grown-ups forget it! Small Meetings can take the lead from children and join into their fun as well as easily fold the few children into the adults' activities. In one small Meeting, there aren't enough children for a Christmas pageant, so the kids and adults do it together!

FIRST DAY SCHOOL

This may be the most difficult factor when the community is small. Children miss having peers in their First Day School; adult teachers may be scarce. To have a strong FDS, the whole Meeting really has to commit to it. Then there are ways to address the difficulties and end up with a nurturing environment.

Charge the FDS committee with responsibility for choosing and organizing the curriculum and the supplies, then the rest of the Meeting (even those who aren't parents and don't have teaching degrees!) are supported in taking the risk of teaching. The whole Meeting membership needs to seriously consider taking a turn teaching—not just parents!

Arrange the schedule so that teachers never have to commit for more than 6 weeks and pair inexperienced teachers with experienced ones. In one Meeting where the adult community really took this task to heart, their FDS immediately grew, the weary parent-teachers felt deeply cared for and the Meeting's love for the children was palpable. (Then the Meeting became complacent, teaching shifted back to the parents' shoulders, the Meeting lost a family).

When there are few children with disparate ages, abilities and temperaments, provide one "Meeting for Teaching" time (a story or other offering by the teacher) with a variety of follow up "Meeting for Learning" activities (activity to dive into the lesson and experience it). For example, after reading a book that many children can enjoy, offer the children the option of art, writing, a discussion or a dollhouse activity to respond to the story. Children, can respond in the way most suited to them.



Maintain a sense of continuity so that even if the teachers change frequently, everything else is the same and the changes will be less disruptive. Use consistent structure in the class (start with silence, then introductions, then a story, then an activity then silence – for example). Keep FDS in the same space; always keep the same toys and art materials in the same place. Also, consider sending an email or postcard home midweek about what happened and what will happen next to keep inconsistent attenders in the loop.



FDS in a box – plan 4 boxes with book, activity and worshipful reflection in each. Keep them ready to pull out whenever a child shows up. Ask 4-8 adults to sign up for weeks to be prepared to be the teacher if one is needed.

JOIN WITH LARGER COMMUNITY

To complement the benefits in small Meetings, by finding the large community strengths in Quarterly and Yearly Meeting events, Middle School and Young Friends events run by PYM. Also some small Meetings join with other Meetings or congregations for worship, fellowship, fun and service to enjoy the fruit of large and diverse community.

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