

Welcoming Quaker Children into Prayer and Worship:

Children are fully spiritual beings. They often see and sense the sacred in everyday life more readily than adults do! If we listen to them carefully and bring this awareness to their art projects and other forms of expression, we may detect a transcendent quality to their experiences. Lack of a sophisticated vocabulary can obscure this reality but if we listen carefully, we can often perceive evidence of early encounters with Spirit. Looking through a less complicated and less cluttered life lens, children seem to have more immediate encounters with the Divine Presence and they receive stirrings of the heart at face value. All of this makes childhood the perfect time to begin sharing about prayer and worship.

Like any Friend, children benefit from a guide along the path, occasions to intentionally hone their skills at listening for God, and a vocabulary that can shape, hold, and communicate their experiences. There's no substitute for matter-of-fact, ongoing, low-voltage sharings of a parent's or grandparent's faith journey. There's power in simple conversations about gratitude, love changing lives, the feelings that accompany leadings, coming to clearness on what is the right thing to do, and other descriptions of our inner experience. These chats validate a child's first steps on his or her spiritual journey and signal that reflective, faith-disclosing conversations are valued and held tenderly. The words, a vocabulary of Quaker faith, offer a framework to organize thought about these inner happenings and perhaps even help gel distinct memories of them.

There are lots of different ways to pray. And it is good to try out different ways and see what seems to make the connection with the Divine Presence clearer and more alive for us. Each one of us is the expert about how this listening or opening ourselves to the Light is going. There are lots of words to use for God or Spirit or the Inner Guide or Light. If one word feels uncomfortable or distracts us, try out using another word! The words aren't the important part, the experience is.

To welcome Quaker children into the realm of prayer, deconstruct some of the basic components of a prayer practice. We can try hands-on, hearts-on activities to let us play our way into a familiarity and comfort with listening in the Light.

Consider basic elements such as:

- stopping and resting from our busy lives,

- focusing on one idea,
- holding people in the light,
- sensing the Divine Presence,
- experiencing prayer with our whole body,
- engaging in worship sharing with children,
- discerning if leadings are coming from the Light or our egos, and
- making prayer a part of our daily life.

Prayer is for everyone.

Prayer is for any moment, situation, or mood.

We get better at Listening for God, the more we do it.

Prayer changes us; it opens our hearts and our imaginations toward
more loving ways of living.

Beth Collea, 2020, 