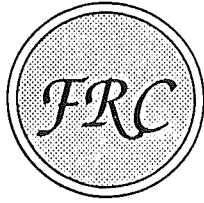


PASTORAL CARE NEWSLETTER



PUBLISHED BY THE FAMILY RELATIONS COMMITTEE
OF PHILADELPHIA YEARLY MEETING

*For Overseers, Members of Ministry and Counsel, and others involved
in pastoral care and counseling*

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Nurturing Children and Families in Meeting

by Marty Smith and Carolyn Terrell

"And they were bringing children to him, that he might touch them; and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it he was indignant, and said unto them, 'Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God.'" RSV Mark 10:13

Perhaps a disciple asked, "Don't you know children are restless and noisy? And perhaps Jesus explained that he valued children's openness to life; children are tender, forgiving, trusting, honest, fun loving, and eager to learn. Dr. Benjamin Spock writes, "The capacity of idealism, creativity and spirituality is latent in every child." Children have spiritual awareness. They have questions about creation, the nature of God, and why bad things happen to good people. They have an urge to learn by experience. They need help in using the silence in meeting for worship (as do adults). Can Overseers nurture these qualities and help children share with everyone in the meeting their joy of living?

Many Friends can identify with both the disciples and with Jesus. When the behavior of children is disruptive, adults may feel like rebuking them. Yet we all know what Jesus meant. The focus of this newsletter is on the role of Overseers in nurturing the spiritual lives of children and their families and for finding solutions when the needs of adults and children are in conflict.

Traditionally, Overseers are concerned with clearness for marriage, memorial services, and helping members and attenders who are ill or in distress. The 1972 PYM Faith and Practice broadens the responsibility of Overseers to include children and young people by suggesting that Overseers *"should be aware of and foster influences that develop the religious life of the children and young people of the meeting, whether members or nonmembers, and should assist in giving them an understanding of the principles and practices of Friends. Overseers should seek to strengthen the work of the Committee on Religious Education or other committees seeking similar ends. Young people desire and need to have a creative part in the life of the meeting; older Friends should recognize the contribution that young people can make."* p. 151.

The Meeting as Extended Family

There was a time when the religious education of children took place in the home, around a Bible each evening, during prayers before meals and at bedtime. Many families attended meeting for worship every Sunday which meant a common experience of shared faith. Now, many families look to the meeting for religious education for their children. However, there is often less than an hour on Sunday for education in the Bible, Quakerism and other topics relating to Quaker testimonies.

Friends once lived in rural settings with grandparents, aunts and uncles, or cousins nearby. Now when their children (now parents) need advice or a reassuring hug or when grandchildren want an older grandparent or confidant to listen to them, relatives are often too far away. Parents look more frequently to the meeting for support. When meetings respond to that need, the number of young families with children is likely to increase dramatically.

Preparation for Worship

The length of time children are expected to sit in meeting for worship has decreased; parents new to Quakerism will not have experienced what it is like for children to sit quietly in meeting. Just getting children to meeting can be a chore. However, we must avoid thinking of meeting as an endurance contest. Parents bring to meeting anxieties and worries about what Friends will think about their child's behavior. They wonder if Friends will think they are bad parents if their child cannot sit quietly in meeting. One child may be able to sit quietly in worship while another of the same age may not be able to.

Overseers can take initiative in preparing children for meeting for worship. Sharing with children their own experience with worship as children and having older Friends tell of prayers that were meaningful to them as children are two of the ways in which this can be approached. Such sharing helps children learn that meeting for worship is a time to be in the presence of God. Also, it's important to remember that children need encouragement to speak in meeting, when led. Other ways to prepare children for worship include developing prayer cards that are illustrated by children and taken to meeting, and making soft fabric books or toys for the same purpose. The making of these things can be done as an intergenerational project. Adults in one meeting delight in being a "lap buddy" to a particular

child so that when a child gets restless during meeting, he or she can walk over quietly and sit on an older Friend's lap. Some meetings have found that a quiet room with books and puzzles, near the worship room and supervised by an adult, is a refuge to which children can go and return as needed during worship.

Supporting Parents and Children

Taking the lead in organizing a parent group to support parents trying to raise their children with Friends values can be a real gift of Overseers to meeting families. More seasoned Friends can bring experience and leavening to such a group and can be valued organizers or contributors. Several meetings have organized discussion groups where there is opportunity to reflect on situations which children face: violence, materialism, competition, and conflict. Ensuring that the library includes books of interest to new parents can be important. The book store of Friends General Conference includes an excellent assortment. In some meetings new babies are introduced at the end of worship with someone giving family history, introducing relatives and holding the baby up for celebration. Still other meetings have taken introduction of new children one step further by holding meetings for dedication during regular worship time or at another time. Some meetings recognize children with a card or gift when they reach milestones like entering school or graduating. One meeting holds a meeting for worship for graduating high school youth. In many meetings children or youth are given a personally inscribed Bible or Faith and Practice at an appropriate age.

When Needs of Children and Adults are in Conflict

Involving young people more effectively in the life of our meetings will occasionally involve conflict between the needs of children and the needs of adults. Have any of these situations occurred in your meeting?

1. A very young baby is making baby noises in meeting for worship; an adult rises to speak, with genuine regret, saying that the baby noises are disturbing his worship. He asks the meeting for help. The young mother is devastated; she stays away from meeting for many weeks.

This Newsletter is published quarterly by the Family Relations Committee of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Trish Walat, clerk. Comments and suggestions are always welcome. Please do not duplicate. To obtain additional copies, contact Helene Pollock, Editor, at (215) 988-0140.

Support for Dealing with Family Issues from the PYM Family Relations Committee

Workshops: "Parenting Creatively -- A Friendly Approach to Parenting" is a six-to-eight week participatory workshop series of two-hour sessions facilitated by Harriet Heath, who is a longtime member of the Family Relations Committee, and a licensed developmental psychologist. This popular workshop series, which is offered through the Family Relations Committee, explores ways of implementing Quaker values in relation to parental goals.

Counseling is provided by the Friends Counseling Service to individuals, couples and families. Counselors have expertise in dealing with young children, adolescents and family relationships.

Consultation is provided by trained counselors to Overseers on issues of pastoral care, including any situations or concerns related to the families, children and youth of the meeting.

For meetings and other Quaker groups within Philadelphia Yearly Meeting: further information regarding fees, consultation and scheduling of workshops may be obtained by calling Steve Gulick, Program Coordinator at 215-988-0140. Meetings or Friends groups outside of PYM who are interested in the workshop series are invited to contact Harriet Heath directly at 610-649-7037.

Services provided by the PYM Religious Education Committee

Discussion groups for parents and other caretakers who wish to raise their children in a Quaker manner are offered free of charge by the Religious Education Committee. The Committee will provide a discussion leader and help the meeting set up an interactional program lasting 45 minutes through an hour and a half, utilizing a format that involves queries. To arrange for a discussion group, meetings and other Friends groups within Philadelphia Yearly Meeting may call Marty Smith at 215-241-7008 or at 1-800-2200-PYM ext. 7008. Meetings outside of PYM are invited to call Marty Smith at the same number to discuss the model and to request copies of the queries used.



PENDLE HILL
A QUAKER CENTER FOR STUDY AND
CONTEMPLATION

Summer Workshops

Spiritual Nurture: A Workshop for Those on Ministry and Counsel

Betty Polster & Janey O'Shea June 15-18

Integrating Quaker Values into Family Life

Harriet Heath & Lynn Sinclair July 7-9

Pendle Hill Youth Camp

Michael Van Hoy and others July 8-15

Weekend Parenting (for Men)

John Scardina August 5 & 12

Changing Families, Changing Lives

John Scardina August 19

For more information about these and other programs contact Irené Ramsay at (800) 742-3150
338 Plush Mill Road · Wallingford, Pennsylvania 19086

Printed Resources

Answering That of God in Our Children, by Harriet Heath, Pendle Hill Pamphlet #315. Inspiring true-life stories of children, parents and the Inner Light.

Addressing Sexual Abuse in Friends Meetings, New England Yearly Meeting, 1994. Important new resource on how to recognize abuse, along with suggestions of how to deal with it.

Cooperative Sports and Games Book, Terry Orleck, Pantheon Press. Over 100 games for people of every size, shape, age, and ability.

Spinning Inward: Using Guided Imagery with Children for Learning, Creativity and Relaxation. Maureen Murdock, Shambhala. Available from Friends General Conference.

Spiritual Life of Children by Robert Coles. Houston Millfin Co., 1990

Listening to the Young People



"Be Teachable" In an attempt to live into the spirit of that admonition from the Advices of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Phil Anthony and Ruth Cameron, who work with young people at Chestnut Hill Meeting, arranged for Helene Pollock, the co-editor of this newsletter, to meet with three young Friends, to hear their ideas about ways in which Overseers (or Ministry and Counsel) can help meetings be more responsive to the needs of the youth. Participants included (left to right) **Patti Anthony (11)**, **Joe Doolin Richardson (17)**, and **Ben Newlin (18)**.

When the starting point of the discussion was left to the young people, worship was the place they chose to begin. Each recognized worship as being central to his or her life as a Friend, although interestingly what they credited as having been most important to their growing appreciation of unprogrammed worship was their participation in Young Friends programs at the Yearly Meeting level.

When asked what they would find helpful, their advice to adults is simple. "Treat us like you'd like to be treated. Treat us with respect," says Ben, "and don't just make chit-chat. I've got views on just about any issue, and I like people who actually can talk about things." Youth want to have significant relationships with meeting adults. Joe says "There's a man in the meeting who's really cool. If I'm having a problem that is typical to teenagers -- sex, drugs, whatever -- and I talk to him about it, he'll recognize that the problem has to do with my being a teenager, but he's also able to be respectful of who I am. He hasn't forgotten what it's like to be a teenager. And he's very open. You could almost say he's 'parental' but he's more like an uncle-type of figure. He's like my former First Day School teacher, who has a quality of listening that has something to do with the Inward Teacher."

Patti encourages adults to move beyond their stereotypes about young people. "Some people seem to not get past the fact that I'm only eleven. Then there are people who just think of me as 'my dad's daughter.' It feels really horrible. It feels like they don't really try to get to know *me*. And I know a few people who think I'm really really really really sweet. But if they got to know me, they would see that I don't like to live up to that. It really drives me nuts. I don't think that most of the adults really know me. But some of them do; I can feel it." Patti continues: "I think one reason why adults don't try to get to know the kids in the meeting that well is because they're scared of us. Don't ask me why. And when they get scared it intimidates the kids and also makes the kids a little shyer. For a kid, when an adult comes up and doesn't even really try to get to know you, it sort of hurts sometimes. But not a lot."

Joe, who became a member of the meeting last year, tells of one meeting member who was able to move beyond first impressions. "When I had my 'Yea!-you're-a-Quaker-now' party, one of the adult members told me how the first time I came to meeting, when he saw how I was dressed, he thought I was just another punk. But later, after hearing me speak in meeting, he changed his mind, and he said 'wow, I've gotta get to know this kid.'"

At Chestnut Hill Meeting, a special forum about young people's concerns was organized by Overseers and Worship and Ministry. For Ben, the forum was "the first time that anybody in the meeting ever listened to what I thought. It was really great. Before that no one really knew *me*." Ben also serves on a Yearly Meeting committee, an experience which he says has helped him to become more comfortable in relating to older persons. He says "I've felt very respected and cared for through them."

Young people have a lot to say, and meetings need to find new and creative ways for them to be heard. As Joe reminds us, "Teens can be very intensely spiritual people." But are we adults open to receiving what they have to give?

2. A small group of adults are sitting in a circle for a committee meeting. Small children are running around the circle, with loud laughter. The adults cannot hear each other. The parents say nothing; the non-parents are reluctant to suggest another activity for the children.
3. During an intergenerational game where adults and children are holding hands in a circle, a few older children delay the game by pulling the circle in and out. The parents say nothing; the children ignore other adults who try to speak to them.
4. Children are included in an invitation to see a slide show. It turns out to be of little interest to them and takes longer than they can sit still.
5. After meeting for worship, during social time, children are running around spilling food or drink. Older adults fear they may be knocked over. Parents are engrossed in conversation and do not stop their children.

All these situations involve differences in needs and interests of children and adults. Some meetings have found solutions as follows: When specific individuals were involved, one meeting provided an opportunity for them to express their feelings in a safe environment. The individuals felt much better, even though the problem wasn't solved immediately. Family worship has been initiated in some meetings. Stories, songs, drama, guided meditation, and short quiet times have provided a setting for adults and children to worship together. Child care during committee meetings, business meetings, and social events is offered in many meetings. A children's corner has been established in some Social Rooms where small tables and chairs, books, puzzles and art materials can be used by children when adults are busy talking.

We need to recognize that parents differ in their expectations for children's behavior. Parents are not usually receptive to unsolicited advice on child-rearing. With the facilitation of Overseers, the meeting community can come to agreement on expectations for behavior. In one meeting, for example, some members of Overseers and of Ministry and Worship met with parents and children to set up guidelines for behavior during Social Hour. Involving children and parents in setting and following through with behavioral expectations is far

more constructive than talking negatively or gossiping about either the children or their parents.

Often Overseers are able to serve as catalysts in finding workable answers when the needs of children and adults are in conflict. The manner in which the solutions are found can serve as a model to children and youth who look to their "elders" to set a good example.

Children With Special Needs

Effectively including a child with special needs is another area of pastoral care in which particular sensitivity is required. One meeting experienced a child in First-day School who continually interrupted the teacher, calling out, and not being able to sit still. She could not recall what the teacher said just ten minutes earlier. The teacher wanted to include the child in the class activities, but others were not able to follow the lesson because of the disturbance. In another meeting, a mentally challenged young adult wanted to learn about his Quaker faith in a middle school class and quietly asked for extra help with instructions or details during the class. The teacher, however, did not have enough time to meet his needs as well as the rest of the exuberant adolescents.

Situations like these need extra loving care from everyone in the meeting. Volunteers, for example, can take turns accompanying the child to First-day School to help with projects, to interpret the lesson, to bring calm when the environment becomes too stimulating, or to take the child out of the room for individual attention when needed.

Helping the entire meeting be more sensitive to the needs of children and families who are coping with special challenges is a contribution which Overseers can make. We can be helpful to families by finding out what the parents want the meeting to know about their child with special needs. For example, "Would you like to tell me about your child?" rather than "What's wrong with your child?" Overseers can facilitate the organization of a group for parents in the Quarter who have special needs children.

Overseers need to be alert to the possibility of serious problems in the lives of meeting

children. Often meeting members are unaware that a member is depressed, drinking in excess or is abusive to spouse or children. If concern arises about serious problems in the life of a meeting child, it is essential that Overseers prayerfully consider how to speak with the family and, if necessary, make connection with a respected professional counselors who is attuned to values important to Quakers.

Differences Among Adults in Meetings

There are broad issues which affect Friends in the meeting community. One potentially divisive issue involves what is taught in First-day School. A faithful attender may offer to teach First-day School every Sunday for the whole year. The offer is gratefully accepted. It may be months before Friends discover that they are very uncomfortable with what is being taught. One meeting Overseer faced this concern by first speaking with the clerk of the Religious Education Committee to see if they were aware of the situation. When the clerk of Overseers found that the Religious Education Committee had tried without success to satisfy the members' concern, she decided to call a threshing session involving parents, teachers and committees involved with what should be taught. There, general agreement was reached and the recommendations were referred to Religious Education for implementation. Often such problems can be averted by more careful discussion at the time of the offer being made. Clear understandings can help to avoid the hurt feelings which arise when someone has given energy to something only to discover that others are disapproving.

Another issue needing attention in some meetings involves the right time for children to come into meeting for worship, at the beginning or the end? Should First-day School be held before, during, or after worship? Should business meeting be held on a weekday evening or on Sunday? Overseers can provide opportunities for prayerful discussion of these questions involving Friends from meeting committees with direct experience with the concern.

Intergenerational Activities

Solutions to all the problems described in this newsletter will be easier if members and

attenders, including children, have opportunities to know each other better.

Overseers can take initiative in planning intergenerational activities. It is a challenge to find activities that are enjoyed by both children and adults. These questions need to be considered: Why do we want children involved in this event? Will both children and adults play important parts in the game or are the children just there for "show"? Are the directions for the game clear for all ages?

Activities that meetings have tried with success include: name tags for everyone; an album with pictures and names of members and attenders; games, square dances, work or service projects; a display of baby pictures with a prize for the person who can guess the most names; dramatics; camping trips; and an evening where hobbies are presented and displayed.

We hope the experiences of meetings, given above, will be helpful as Friends look for ways to include children, youth, and adults in the life of the meeting. We hope that Quaker children will have opportunities to share their insights, and openness.

Marty Smith, the Executive Secretary of the PYM Religious Education Committee, has extensive teaching and leadership training experience. She is a member of the Moorestown Monthly Meeting.

Carolyn Terrell has interacted with children in nursery school, First-Day School and in her extended family for many years. She belongs to Mount Holly Meeting.

Queries

1. What part do we, as Overseers, play in welcoming and valuing children and their parents into the meeting community?
2. What changes in our physical plant and in our meeting's procedures would benefit children and their parents?
3. Do we consider the needs of children and parents in our regular Overseers (Ministry and Counsel) meetings?
4. Do we feel satisfied with the way in which we integrate young people into the life of our meeting? Are there any ways in which we would like to strengthen our efforts in this regard?