

# Pastoral Care *Newsletter*

For Member Care Committees,  
Ministry and Counsel, Overseers,  
and others who provide pastoral care  
in unprogrammed Friends' meetings.

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## Quaker Principles Give Parents Nurturing Foundation

by Harriet Heath and Larue Evans

The future of Quakerism lies in the hands of our children. Trite as it sounds, that is still true. Less recognized but equally true: Meetings reach children through their parents. Parents can be more powerful teachers of Quakerism than meetings ever can be because they have the children 24/7.

Parents can model what Quakerism can mean in children's lives, and teach and practice Quakerly ways of living. And also true, parents are seekers looking to integrate their parenting into their own spiritual journey.

Most parents come to Quaker meeting looking for more than a place to plunk their children for an hour on Sunday morning. They are looking for a spiritual home for their families. They want guidance as to how to nurture their children so their children can become healthy contributors to society, a society committed to the greater good for all and to the Light within each.

Quakerism has much to offer. However, its

messages and strengths for parents in nurturing their children are not often clearly articulated.

### "Here they come...there they go!"

Childhood is so short. Parents ask, "What shall we do during that ellipse, those years between "here" and "there"? How can we support our children to find that inner source of strength and direction? What do they need in their quest to reach their potential? How can we help our children envision a world of possibilities? How can we provide our children with the necessary tools to create that world envisioned?"

Parents are looking for a place where they can gain a calm perspective and search out answers to their questions. They are seeking direction in their own lives as to how they can nurture their children. They are asking what message Quakerism brings to parents. They want a place where they can explore the meaning of parenting in their own spiritual journeys.

We live in a time when

*This is the second in a series of four issues devoted to children and their place in the life of the meeting. The March issue will consider how children and young people are welcomed at various ages. In June look for an issue focusing on families with children in Quaker schools. .*



Larue Evans and Harriet Heath

family life is fragmented by work and after-school activities that often spill over into the daily dinner hour and into weekend schedules. It is a time when children, viewed as consumers, are bombarded by media stories, advertising and talking heads that speak their opinions without scholarly research. In this time parents seek a place where they and their children feel welcomed and where they, as a family, can find meaning to life beyond the business and materialism of the culture.

Quakers can give a warm greeting to families with children of all ages. When grandparents are far away, it is good to have someone to talk with about what Johnny is doing in school and laugh with over Suzy's recent exploits. It's a good thing when a meeting can occasionally set aside the quiet for the gentle nursing of a baby or the whispered secret to a parent (that can be heard throughout the room). There may even be special persons who can listen to parental worries with a non-judgmental ear about the tantrums of their two-year-old or share their concerns about the adolescent who may be experimenting with drugs. The meeting forms a community for parents in which to raise their children.

### **Quakerism's Gifts**

Several years ago, a group of Quaker women met over a three-year period to share their experiences of living with children. Through sharing, they gained insight as to how their Quakerism had been, and continued to be, the foundation for discerning how to nurture their children.

They concluded that Quakers' belief in "walking the talk" challenges parents to live their faith while caring for their children. That guidance rests on the advice of George Fox to "answer that of God in every person." This means we are looking for the Divine in our children even when a child is having a temper tantrum in the supermarket or the teenager is rolling his eyes and not moving when asked to

take out the trash. Seeing our children as seekers, who are trying to understand their world and are looking for their way in that world, gives a whole different tone to the supermarket experience or the inert teenager. It gives us a perspective of their journey, as well as our own journey, as we struggle to guide them through situations.

Knowing we can work through those many situations is grounded in our faith that there is a Way. This is an important belief, especially when our children are testing their wings through decisions and actions that leave us fearful for their well-being. The belief that a Way will open keeps parents present for their children and open to new possibilities. Leadings, insights and the ability to discern give us the power to find the Way.

The Quaker testimonies—Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality, Stewardship, and Service—provide a foundation for parents' leadings and insights. These are time-tested statements shows how we could live our lives especially since they often stand in contrast to the values of the day. They give outer guidance and support for their inner leanings.

The testimonies are not easy to interpret into family life. Does one expect integrity, truthful answers, from a three-year-old who has difficulty differentiating reality from the world of "let's pretend"? Are there consequences for children who aren't up on the current TV show that may be discussed the next morning among kids at school?

Parents must face developmental realities and social situations as they integrate the testimonies into family life and teach their children values by which to live. Parenting is a good example of what Rufus Jones labeled "active mysticism." By being there for their children, searching to understand them, and seeking ways to guide them, parents grow in their own understanding by following their own inner guide and external supports. The process is an ongoing revelation. Parenting becomes part of parents' spiritual journey.

## Quaker Parenting Initiative

The Quaker Parenting Initiative (QPI), a project of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's Education Standing Committee and Friends Counseling Service, and sponsored by Friends' Institute, evolved from that original group of mothers. (See bottom Page 4.)

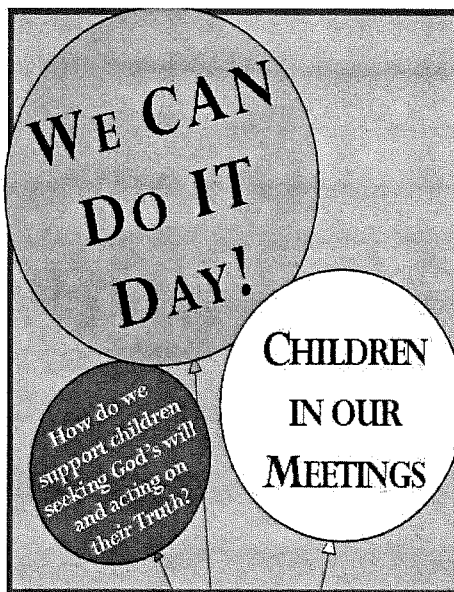
Recognizing that most meetings are not prepared to provide opportunities to explore parenting issues within a Quakerly context, the QPI offers workshops and discussion series where parents can consider their child-rearing issues within the strengths the mothers had found Quakerism offers.

Using questions or queries, parents can learn to deal with their own issues: the three-year-old who begs loudly for everything she sees, the child who has no friends, or the adolescent who refuses to abide by the curfew. Parents learn strategies of questioning that they can use to deal with future issues.

They practice being centered while envisioning children arguing around them. Being centered helps parents respond to their children with greater insight and control. In trying to raise their children non-violently, parents have the opportunity to explore, with other like-minded parents, their concerns about the violent playground or unsupervised school bus

Quaker practices can provide parents useful strategies. For example, centering, that is so much a part of our meeting for worship, strengthens our ability to deal with those upsetting situations all parents face. The practice of queries, focusing on asking questions and discerning the larger context before stepping in to correct or forbid,

## PYM's "We Can Do It Day"...



... offers support and skills training to PYM meetings through workshops, information, a children's program and fellowship. February 26 will focus on care for and inclusion of children in the fabric of the meeting's life, from pastoral care to effective witness, from worship to property concerns, from parenting to First Day School. Caring for our children is the work of the entire meeting. For more information contact Christie Duncan-Tessmer, Associate Secretary for Program & Religious Life: 215-241-7008; email [christiedt@pym.org](mailto:christiedt@pym.org).

opens parents to better understanding of the child, the situation, and helps parents find their way through the tangle of conflicting messages and over-busy schedules.

The PYM workshop facilitators are Quakers, experienced workshop leaders, well grounded in human development. Thus they are able to integrate the strengths of Quakerism with the scientific understanding of human development.

The Quaker Parenting Initiative adapts its workshops to meet the needs of inquiring groups. Most discussion series feature two-hour sessions that take place weekly for six weeks. Some groups prefer to meet monthly over a six-month period. Our leadership is willing to travel; some of our discussion series have been two and three hours away from our home base.

The family weekend is an innovative format, with a potluck dinner Friday evening, sessions for parents and children all day Saturday and a closing session around Sunday meeting for worship. The family weekend program can go anywhere. We send QPI leaders to help the local group plan the details of the weekend including childcare and other details. We currently have

plans to try an online discussion series using SKYPE that will be available to all regardless of geography. Fees are based on contact hours and the distance the leaders have to travel.

### **Challenge for Meetings**

For meetings, the question is how to help parents integrate the strengths of Quakerism into their lives with children. A major step is to recognize that parents are coming with their own spiritual needs. Meeting for Worship presents a powerful invitation to center in the silence. Finding the time to do so is the reality and challenge.

Tom Hoopes, in his *Friends Journal* article (“Young Families and Quakerism: Will the Center Hold?” May 2008), writes that if meetings are to provide a haven for young children and their parents, they may need to reflect inwardly as to how welcoming they are.

“That is,” Hoopes says, “we must offer them...parents and children ... a community that does not simply accept them and their children, but which pro-actively embraces them and nourishes them, personally and spiritually.”

He argues that this may mean changes in the degree of silence, the amount of orderliness or the tidiness we expect in meeting. It may mean helping older members become comfortable with the changes. We may need to develop a culture that not only accepts but also welcomes the energy and vitality of young children.

Being accepted into meeting with their children gives parents a resting place to gather themselves. However, they are living in a world where a multitude of values are in conflict with their values. Parents struggle with the stress of helping their children find ways to address the conflicts between Quaker values and society’s mores.

They want to rear their children to be non-violent but also want them safe on unsupervised playgrounds. Parents want to live a simple life but their children are bombarded with messages of enticing toys and materialistic definitions of

self-worth. They want to help their children see the different consequences that their choices can create and to be alert to the moments when those choices are being made.

In this haven of support, which a meeting can provide, children are welcomed. Parents find friendly people to share with and the meeting can become a place where children make friends who share similar values.

Giving parents the opportunity to explore the meaning of Quakerism in their own lives means they are better able to model and explain Quakerism to their children. They have a vital role in teaching their children about the hows and whys of Quakerism, about the joys and challenges of living in a Quakerly manner. And out of such support from meeting and parents, our children will be better able to create a future good for all.

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*For over 30 years, Harriet Heath has met with Quaker parents in groups and singly. She finds that Quaker parents are searching for how to nurture their children to be responsible caring adults in a culture that values neither. Harriet is a licensed psychologist, certified school psychologist, parent educator, a mother of three and grandmother of six. She is a member of Radnor (PA) Friends Meeting.*

*For 23 years, Larue Evans taught in a K-12 Quaker school, where she developed a teaching philosophy of using developmentally supportive approaches. She transferred this approach to public schools where she taught for 12 years. She is a leader in the Quaker Parenting Initiative, the mother of two grown children and a member of Moorestown (NJ) Friends Meeting.*

**(Note: More information about QPI programs, leadership, and availability is found on the web site, [quakerparenting.org](http://quakerparenting.org). Or, to discuss how to support parents in your own meeting, you may contact the Quaker Parenting Initiative, Harriet Heath —610-649-7037— or [Harriet\\_Heath@hotmail.com](mailto:Harriet_Heath@hotmail.com).)**

# One Meeting's Experience: Moorestown's Parenting Classes Enrich Families & Meeting

by Marty Smith

In 2004, the Religious Education Committee of Moorestown (NJ) Friends Meeting saw a need to reach out to parents from three nearby affiliated Friends Schools. Since very few parents in Friends Schools are Quakers, we thought that we could teach about Quakerism and also provide the occasion for parents to share their struggles with one another.

So, we invited the parents to attend a four-week course at Moorestown Meeting during January. Our objective was to provide a spiritually safe space for parents to make decisions about how to raise their children according to their faith and their values.

## Questions for Reflection

1. How can we create a community that embraces seeking and member families?
2. How do we clearly articulate Quaker beliefs to these families?
3. How do we help parents integrate Quaker principles into family life?
4. How can we help families live in a society in which children are being challenged by conflicting messages and values?
5. How can our meeting answer the spiritual needs of parents?
6. If our meeting is near or associated with a Friends school, what programs do we offer those parents, as well as our own meeting parents?

The Religious Education Committee made sure that there was child-care during the hour-long classes, which were a combination of worship, worship sharing, and information. We explored Quakerism and child development, had brainstorming responses to situations parents encounter with their children, and practiced discerning our own values and faith, all interspersed with laughter, occasional tears, and joy.

One of the Friends School parents struggled with a desire for her child to embrace the Peace Testimony. In the final week of the course, she came to the realization that she wasn't a very peaceful person herself and wondered how she could expect her child to learn peaceful ways. She spent the next two years working on her own spiritual life. This fall, she returned to our meeting with her child and has become a regular attendee.

Both parents are given a homework assignment to write one or two tenets of their own faith and to come to agreement if they could. For the first two or three classes, one couple's body language and responses, when discussing how to respond to their children, indicated that they were miles apart. After this assignment, the two parents began to sit closer together in class. Then, in the final class, I watched them holding hands and responding together to situations.

We pose a query about how parents have grown in their faith since having children. Out of this worship sharing comes deep, spirit-filled responses. In the five years I have led this Quaker Parenting course, parents have shown a profound hunger to talk with each other in the context of their faith about their very challenging task.

Offering a Quaker Parenting class has had several effects. Every year about a dozen parents attend, mostly from Moorestown Friends School along with a few from two other, smaller Friends schools. Many of the parents and their children

stay for Meeting for Worship and First Day School, and several have become members.

One year, a grandparent came, so she could be a better grandmother, and to take notes for her daughter, who was providing child-care for the meeting. There are always three or four meeting parents, who come back year after year to the class. The classes have strengthened the spiritual lives of parents and grandparents and provided moral support in their task as care givers.

Before coming to New Jersey, my husband, Bill, and I taught in Ohio and Michigan, and in East Africa with the Peace Corps. As we raised our children, we had to figure out what to do all on our own because our families lived far away from us. The common values that we held were guides for us but, basically, we stumbled along.

I first became involved with the Quaker Parenting Initiative when our children were teenagers. As Director of Religious Education for Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (PYM), I came to know Harriet Heath, co-author of the lead article in this issue.

Our paths crossed again when a group of Quaker parents began writing "Paths to Quaker Parenting." The process we recommend in that manual and use to facilitate parenting groups, is one that has worked for us and gives parents the tools to make decisions based on the values by which they are raising their children.

Quaker Parenting classes are a wonderful way to reach out to Friends School parents, to educate them about Quakerism, and to draw them into the spiritual life of meetings. Each year we invite parents in neighboring meetings as well. The deep sharing which occurs builds community among parents within and beyond the meeting. This is an excellent opportunity for

## Resources

Heath, H. Ed. *Paths to Quaker Parenting using Quaker beliefs, testimonies and practices*. Haverford, PA: Conrow Publishing, 2010.

\_\_\_\_\_ *Answering that of God in our children*. Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Pamphlet #315, 1994

\_\_\_\_\_ *Using your values to raise your child to be an adult you admire*, Seattle, WA: Parenting Press, 2000

Hoopes, T. "Young Families and Quakerism: Will the Center Hold?" *Friends Journal*, May 2008

Boulding, Lisa *One small plot of heaven: Reflections on family life by a Quaker sociologist*. Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications 1989

Rutter, Michael, "A Measure of our values: Goals and dilemmas in the upbringing of children." Swarthmore Lecture. London, 1983

meetings not only to connect with neighboring Friends Schools, but also to support the life of parents in their meetings.

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*Marty Smith, a member of Moorestown Meeting, holds a BA and an MS in early childhood education. After a career as a classroom teacher, teacher educator, and religious educator, she currently teaches elementary science at Buckingham (PA) Friends School. She and her husband, Bill, met at a Quaker camp. They have two married children and two grandchildren..*

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