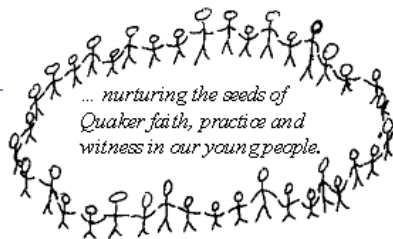


Teaching the Practice of Worship

As Friends, we share the understanding that we each, regardless of our age, have within us the capacity for connection to the Divine. The capacity is there regardless of our intent to nurture it. But our ability to nurture it is what then supports and encourages us to live from the Center, to let our lives speak, to experience ourselves as children of God.

Adults who have the care of children, including parents, teachers, friends and Meeting communities which serve as the spiritual home for children, have a particular responsibility for teaching children how to access their capacity for connection. Adults need to shape the external lives of our children and nurture their internal lives. This pamphlet offers ideas and suggestions for adults to teach children the practice of worship, both in Meeting for Worship and in their daily lives.



*This pamphlet was prepared by Religious Education staff and the Children's Spiritual Life Committee of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.
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QUERIES

- ✎ It's been said that the most significant part of Meeting for Worship is the week leading up to it. What does this mean in the life of a family? How can the week leading up to Worship be arranged to nurture children's experience of Worship?
- ✎ How can adults make space for quiet, open time in children's lives?
- ✎ How do the structures and practices of our community worship demonstrate our faith in the capacity of our children to worship? In what ways does our Monthly Meeting intentionally guide children into worship?
- ✎ Do you seek the Kingdom of God in the words and understanding of children?

2007-2008

Support for Families
and Meetings in
their care of children

Teaching the Practice of Worship



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Teaching the Practice of Worship

“Teaching children is important for adults as well as children. As we tell children the stories of the faith, talk with them about God, and answer their questions, we refocus on God. Our love is rekindled as we remember God’s acts, and as we wrestle with the questions raised by our children, we stretch and grow. We are on the faith journey together and we need each other.”

~ Catherine Stonehouse

The adults in a child’s life support the child’s connection to Spirit by sharing, modeling and teaching Friends’ manner of worship. This pamphlet offers a starting place for the two most significant teachers in a Quaker child’s spiritual journey: the family and the Meeting. It then reminds readers of children’s capacity to be teachers to adults.

FAMILY AS TEACHER

- When children see themselves reflected in their parents eyes as loved to their very core, they see that of God in themselves. This is a most powerful beginning.
- The family offers an opportunity for a regular practice of worship. Whether it’s grace, centering before homework, worship-sharing together or traditional unprogrammed worship. A regular worship routine allows children to practice and strengthen their ability to be in worship. It also makes space for the spiritual to be routinely placed ahead of the worldly concerns in the family’s life.

- Language for describing spiritual experiences and telling faith stories and histories is an important tool to give children. Language helps children to name what they know experientially to be true. Also, stories, songs and prayers—shared collectively—help children recognize our common journey and their place of belonging within their families, Meeting communities and the wider Quaker spiritual tradition.

- Unprogrammed time at home and out of doors allows children to nurture their interior landscape and allows them to feel at home with little exterior stimulation. This prepares them for Meeting for Worship.

- Honor silence in the home.



- Choices about everyday life can support children’s connection to God: turn off the TV and electronic games, decrease the number of toys that reference popular culture; make space in the calendar for at least one day of no scheduled activities after school; leave long pauses in conversation for reflection time; don’t talk to children when they are involved in their play; express your reverence for nature, music, art—nonverbally; take a listening walk together.

- Parents participating in their own spiritual practice, separate from a family or corporate practice, will model it as a value for their children. Additionally, the parents will be fed in a way that will allow them to share a life in God with their children in a way that nothing else will.

THE MEETING AS TEACHER

- When a child sees his Meeting seeing that of God within him, he can know that he is a spiritual being. To have a whole community of people supporting and responding to him as a beloved child of God is a powerful, empowering gift.
- Learning to worship takes practice. The Meeting must be willing to allow the children to be in worship without knowing how to do it so they have the opportunity to learn.
- Meetings need to carefully consider their responsibility to share songs, prayers, practices, stories and history with children. We all need these traditions so we can proclaim joy (and anguish and love and fear...) when needed! These are ways Friends have given witness to their interior journeys for centuries. They provide an understanding of who we are so we can continue to be Friends through generations.
- Consider *not* offering children books, soft toys and drawing materials during worship. They may distract children from discovering what richness lies in that stillness. Toys and books may send a message that we don’t believe kids can join in the mystery of silence. Slowly weaning children away from props over a few weeks may be more effective than going cold turkey.
- Consider it the adults’ responsibility to go deep into worship with the kids present so that they can experience the power of connected, grounded worship.
- Entering into worship in the manner of Friends with children is challenging. Meetings need to both recognize this and work together as a community to map their expectations, dreams and fears as well as to plan how to support *all* members of the community when including children in worship.

CHILDREN AS TEACHERS

- When adults see children seeing that of God within them, the adults can know they are spiritual beings. Allow yourself to be seen, by yourself and your children, as a spiritual being.
- Children’s relationship to the Divine may look and function in a qualitatively different way from adults. Be a student of their ability to be in the moment. Listen for their awareness of the sacred in the every-day.
- Children can teach us to use simple and straightforward language. This discipline insists that we stay close to the point and can open doors that are obscured by volumes of words.

FURTHER RESOURCES

- [Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey: Nurturing a Life of Faith](#) by Catherine Stonehouse
- [Gently Lead: How to teach your children about God while finding out for yourself](#) by Polly Berrien Berrends
- [Children & Worship](#) issue of the Spiritual Life newsletter: **Making Space**, online at www.pym.org/education/relednews
- [Opening Doors to Quaker Worship](#) by FGC RE Committee

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