

Outreach and Communication Thread: families with children and youth

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Parents tell us they come to our meeting because they are seeking a community that will help provide a compass for how to live in these unsettled times and allow them an hour of quiet. Families “find” us through our website and/or our street sign, both of which were replaced and updated during the Covid pandemic.

Messaging: *We welcome you; we are ready for you. We have a program for children and youth every week.*

- Website: Ours has lots of color and pictures of people and activities. Links to videos (some made by our youth) and a calendar. The meeting hired a person with website experience to create a new site for us when FGC announced that their website service was being discontinued.
- Street sign: Large, prominent, easy to read, welcoming
- Outdoor play space: Near the entrance door to the meetinghouse, a low saucer swing hangs from a tree and there are wide low logs for children to play on. The tree is a gathering place for children and parents before and after meeting.
- Inside – “their space”:
 - A playroom/nursery connects to the classroom space so younger children can come and go when they are ready to be in program or not ready and need quiet time or another activity.
 - A dedicated space in the worship room for families with young children. A soft rug on the wood floor where children can sit and wiggle at their parents’ feet. Baskets of quiet activity materials for settling – coloring pages, puzzles, books, pipe cleaners, a magnifying glass and small boxes containing something nice to hold – a shell, a polished stone, colored pompoms.
 - ADA-compliant restroom with changing table and step stool.

Welcoming language: Instead of “Religious Education” and “First-day school,” we use “children and youth program.” Instead of “teachers,” our adult leaders see themselves as “guides,” who walk with children and youth as they and their inner lives grow and develop. Meeting is a safe and welcoming place for families.

Program philosophy: Use stories and outdoor experiences for encounter and exploration. Use open-ended questions to encourage wondering – “What part of this story is important to me today?” Accompany children and youth as they encounter new people, places, images, and words in stories and other activities. Acknowledge that what they think and feel today will grow and change quickly; new truths will be revealed. Support their leadings to take action.

- Our weekly program begins in a circle on the floor to greet and check-in. Then a story with wondering questions or an outdoor activity. Singing. Help make and serve refreshments. Art materials and work space for exploring and expressing thoughts and feelings. Ours is a multi-age classroom.
- Godly Play (Bible stories) and Faith & Play (Quaker stories) and other stories.
- Outdoor “classroom”: Other themes include stories of Indigenous people; cycles of the seasons; collecting seeds and seedlings, growing trees – care for the Earth. Each child in our meeting has planted a tree on the meeting property grown from a seed or seedling they tended in our little outdoor nursery.
- Youth meet once a month in their own committee with an adult advisor. Practice clerking and decision-making. Plan service and fund-raising projects; have fun together.

Keeping in touch: A weekly email note to parents about what is coming up for children, youth and families at our meeting, quarterly meeting and yearly meeting. The meeting also has a weekly email bulletin.

Work in progress:

- That when our meeting makes decisions, large and small, we consider the impact on families.
- Our meeting will grow to be more comfortable with intergenerational worship. We are partnering with our Worship and Ministry committee on this.
- Host or participate in a family meet-up with other Quaker families in our area.
- Provide other opportunities for parents to know each other and explore Quakerism.