



How do we continue to engage our children, young people, and their families each week in worship and religious education, during “physical distancing?”

Reflections on this time:

- Recognize that not only do different people have their own needs in a challenging time, but developmentally, children and young people have different needs at various ages.
- Don't make assumptions about how young people are doing, but make yourself available to listen. Being present is important, and will be noticed.
- Worship can be for all ages! For some meetings, there is an opportunity to gather virtually and make space for children to participate from home in ways that work for them and their parents. Support children's presence, and also leave expectations up to families. (more below)
- Zoom fatigue is real, and will become more acute before we're done. Some families are making the weekends “screen free” time because of schooling online, and others do not have consistent access to the internet at home. How can we reach them?

Support for Religious Education Committees:

- Committees need time to check in; what tools work best for your committee? (phone, email, Zoom). Meeting clerks can ask the committee: what do you need?
- Do you know what families are up to at home (school, work, access to groceries or other support?) and how you can support their need for spiritual nurture, too? Can the RE committee partner with the pastoral care committee to reach out and check on families?
- Support for Families & First Day Programs was published on the PYM website March 18, and has ideas and resources linked.
- The Quaker Religious Education Collaborative has a new web page with resources related to virtual and distance gathering: <http://www.quakers4re.org/valiant-together2020>

- QREC also has a new group on Facebook, where lots of ideas are being shared: “*Valiant Together: Sharing Quaker Religious Education Support and Resources During COVID-19*” <https://www.facebook.com/groups/ValiantTogetherQuakerRE/>
- A special issue of the Tote Bag was published related to COVID-19, which included an invitation to gather with other RE committee members and Quarter staff. We had a good discussion, and I’m happy to create a space for conversation again.
- The “Tote Bag” e-newsletter will continue to be sent with ideas, and I’d love for the next issue to be a place to share what Friends are up to in your meetings!

First Day Programs and Worship: online and home

- We are needing to rethink ways to be together — This doesn’t only need to be online, and it’s important to be mindful about families who don’t have online access, or are limiting it.
- Some meetings are moving their religious education program online to Zoom:
 - can happen before or after meeting for worship
 - some meetings are using “chat rooms” for children and adults to meet together *during* worship — be aware that this requires a family to have multiple devices, and also that child safety and the “rule of three” still applies in virtual spaces
 - there are many resources to support creating online programs — books, songs, stories on YouTube, free materials to download and send to families by email to print (or in the mail — be aware of who isn’t able to print at home!)
 - ◆ [Illustrated Ministry FREE coloring pages](#)
 - ◆ [Rise Up and Sing](#) (including Annie Patterson sing-alongs)
 - ◆ [Godly Play® \(Bible\) stories](#) and a [Faith & Play \(Quaker\) story](#), “Listening for God” on the Godly Play YouTube channel
 - ◆ NOTE: Faith & Play Stories, Inc. is creating a YouTube channel with additional Faith & Play stories recorded for Friends to share

- a Friend described to me her hope that the children in her meeting would find new ways to *work on the same things, and be thinking about the same things together*. Is there a project you can work on together, while you're apart? My meeting is going to ask the children to "have care of a tree" in their yard or neighborhood, and share pictures and stories about this experience two weeks later.
- If you are able to meet virtually, it's an opportunity to gather for all-ages worship, and families can use Zoom tools — mute, turning down the sound on their end — as needed. Children can move in and out of the space, and also be together with their family in worship in a new way.
- Encourage parents to have the kinds of things available we have at all-ages worship at Sessions: a basket of books, quiet coloring things, even a snack for the hour. But while we want to make families feel comfortable and welcome, also make room for children to participate!
- *Beware assumptions that children aren't participating in waiting worship in their own way — they are gathered with their family, and their community. They are experiencing being included. Children at my meeting have been sharing vocal ministry on a regular basis, particularly if they have heard a story before worship.*
- Are there other times in the week to worship or have fellowship that families might be interested in, beyond Sunday morning?
- Is there an opportunity to use Quarterly Meeting communities as a way to gather? If the meetings in your Quarter have small numbers of children, the Quarter creates a wider community for them. Perhaps meetings in the Quarter take turns hosting a weekly lesson or activity for children, particularly if you are meeting online.
- If you are not meeting virtually, share with families suggested activities for spiritual nurture at home. Parents will have varying levels of comfort with this, and may appreciate clear directions, suggestions, and encouragement. Family exploration of spiritual formation can deepen our connections to one another and the Divine in this time.
 - Be mindful of materials needed, and that they are probably already on hand at home.

- Can families receive resources over email? print at home? do you need to mail things to them?
- An example of for home:
"Remembering, Hoping, and Being Present: worship at home"

Wider Opportunities to Gather:

- *This is a perfect time to encourage families, and MS and HS youth, to join an event or gathering — they can try out a new community from their own home.*
- *PYM programs seek to be in partnership with local meetings to share with their community what's available to them. Children don't drive themselves places; we need support from local meetings to connect with young and new families!*
- Children's Worship Group: Wednesdays (starting April 1 from 7:30-8:30pm)
Registration is on the Children and Families events page.
- Families with children in K-5th may also be interested in "Family Devotionals" happening multiple times in a week, led by various Friends. There are four different time slots with 5 different facilitators. Families in six different time zones are participating, including Quakers in the UK. The sign-up link:
tinyurl.com/quakerfamilydevotionals
- April 18 Virtual Quaker Family Meetup (3-5pm) — an opportunity for PYM Families of infants to teens to join together for fellowship, play, snacks and spiritual refreshment. This one is "BYOS" — bring your own snacks!
- Middle School Friends (Grades 6-8) and Young Friends (high school) programs are finding new ways to gather and connect — virtually, and other ways to stay in relationship.
 - "Youth Programs Zooming" tells the story of online programs during Spring Continuing Sessions weekend
 - Virtual times together during the May 1-3 weekend in lieu of the Camp Swatara gathering, which will be posted on the MSF and Young Friends events pages.

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