

Being Friends Together

Ways of Working > Ways of Working with Groups

Working with all age or all inclusive learning groups

There are many learning sessions within the *Being Friends Together* resource which are suitable for all age or all inclusive learning groups. Wherever a session is marked 'all age' this denotes that it is well suited to a mixed age group, from young children through to adults. It should also be borne in mind that these sessions may be particularly suitable for including those of *any age* in the meeting community who do not always find traditional forms of adult learning easy to engage with; this might include adults with learning disabilities and those who prefer creative, playful or interactive approaches to learning.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines for working with all age and all inclusive learning groups adapted from the Quaker Life publication *Spring into all age worship*. See below for more specific guidance and resources for involving young people in all age learning.

Planning

Keep the plan simple and prepare well – careful planning pays off! Children particularly like to know what is happening. Prepare them well and they will respond positively and [your learning session] will be a good experience for everyone. Involve as many people as possible in the planning. Ask children [and young people] to [help introduce activities, be elders for periods of worship or take other responsibilities within your session].

Children [and others in all age learning sessions] will share their innermost thoughts if we can listen carefully to them – looking at a picture they've done, hearing their words, watching their actions.

Don't be daunted by the prospect of doing all age [learning]. There may be a few obstacles to start with but the benefits will far outweigh any doubts or anxieties. The sense of togetherness and community in all age [learning] is a joy.

Practicalities

When introducing an [all age or all inclusive learning] activity it is very important to make sure to make the physical environment as inclusive as possible. Use low tables so children can see onto them and older people do not have to reach down to the floor. Make sure paper, pencils, etc. have been distributed where everyone can reach them; invite care for each other's needs.

<http://together.woodbrooke.org.uk>



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Be careful that introductions are clear and easy to understand. An introduction or reading by a child, young person [or adult with a learning disability] is a lovely idea but if it is given in a hesitant whisper it may leave people anxious and confused. A sensitive repetition for clarity could be helpful. This might also be a difficulty with [spoken responses to activities]. A sensitive 'I liked it when Katie said that she...' will help those saddened by feelings of exclusion.

In any activity it is important that everyone is free to choose whether they draw, write, doodle or make, or whether they just think or imagine. Some people find writing very difficult, others become very anxious if asked to draw; each person must feel able to contribute in the way that is comfortable for them. How can we find our own way to express or describe our thoughts or feelings? Can we share them with each other? What is our ministry?

Involving young people in all age learning

Young Friends have commented that "Large age gaps in some local meetings create a negative effect on young people's participation. Some people have found that all age activities are beneficial for this." Similar experiences can also be true for other people in meetings. A special issue of *Journeys in the Spirit* 'Connecting as a Community' looks at young people's participation. Participation means that "young people should be fully integrated within the Yearly Meeting and have a real impact on all aspects of our life and work so that the whole meeting can grow from this involvement" (Meeting for Sufferings Minute 4, 7 May 2005).

'Connecting as a Community' provides a range of ideas to use for one-off sessions or activities as a community of all ages from 12 onwards, including several 'getting to know you' or ice-breaker activities that could be used at the start of any all age learning session.

Download 'Connecting as a Community' guidance on involving young people in planning and facilitating all age sessions here or from the *Ways of Working* page.

www.quaker.org.uk/sites/default/files/0%20Using%20this%20material.pdf

Download *Journeys in the Spirit* special issue 'Connecting as a Community' and its additional resources here or from the *Ways of Working* page.

<http://bit.ly/journeys-connecting-as-a-community>

www.quaker.org.uk/participation-materials

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Six ingredients for building all age community

Getting to know each other

In small meetings this is easier than in big meetings. Do we make and take opportunities to speak with children and young people to get to know them better or for them to be able to get to know us, for example after meeting for worship. Some very big meetings occasionally ask people to wear name badges on a Sunday morning to help people get to know each other's names.

Doing things together

There are many activities which bring us together as a community. After meeting for worship, people of all ages may gather together for coffee, have a discussion, game or craft activity, or share a simple lunch.

Valuing each other

This is about recognising the gifts and skills of others and how to use them, so we fit together as a community rather like a patchwork. This includes recognising the gifts and skills children and young people bring and valuing each and every person in the meeting for who they are.

Supporting each other

Do we take the time to listen carefully to each other, to find out about other people in the meeting, and of any help or support they may need? Children and young people need support too. Do children and young people have their own overseers in your meeting? Is there time and opportunity for them to engage with the adults in the meeting and with each other?

Sharing our journeys

We all learn from each other and that goes for children and young people too. We are all on a spiritual journey, and we are all at different points along that road. We can all learn from each other's experiences and often children and young people have rich and illuminating experiences to share.

Worshipping together

The Quaker community contains all these 'ingredients' underpinned by our worship together.



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In our meeting for worship we meet together, we spend time together, we share with one another and we listen to one another steadying the truth within us and 'giving' to one another in ministry. 'We seek a gathered stillness' in our worship and we need to share this with our children and young people. Although there are times when children and young people need to be with their peer group, and adults need time to worship [or learn] alone, the community is enriched when all ages worship [and learn] together.

Adapted from *All in one room: Shared worship in our all age worshipping community*, Quaker Life, and reproduced with permission

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