

Being Friends Together

Ways of Working > Ways of Working with Groups

The main ways Friends work together in groups

Creative listening

A way of speaking in a group without commenting on what others say. One person speaks at a time, either round the circle or in any order as led. Allow enough time for a few minutes each with pauses between contributions.

Go-round

Like creative listening but shorter – a minute or so for each person at the most. Consider having a go-round before sharing through discussion.

Working with a partner

Partners take turns to speak and listen in response to the question. Five minutes each is the minimum needed for sharing in any depth; ten minutes each feels more spacious. emphasise the role of the listener.

Discussion

In a group of more than seven people, divide for the main discussion, then share key points in the group. Aim to keep a balance between those with a lot to say and those who find speaking in a group less easy.

Thought shower (brainstorm)

Encourage a free-flow of lots of thoughts and record everything offered on a flip chart. When ideas slow down, group similar contributions together, or prioritise, depending on your purpose.

Silent thought shower

Clear the floor space and place in the centre a question printed on a large sheet. In silence throughout, write as many responses as you like in marker pen on A5 sheets and place on the floor to be read from standing. (Alternatively use sticky notes on a flip chart). Move around during the activity to read the responses and add further thoughts arising. Friends rearrange responses if they wish, grouping similar points together. Optionally, settle into creative listening around the written responses.

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



Being Friends Together is a joint project of Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre (Registered Charity Number: 313816) and Britain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) (Registered charity number: 112763).



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Pooling responses

Display flip charts headed with different questions around the room. Friends respond on separate sticky notes to place on the chart. Small groups each take a sheet away to read the responses and open up discussion or creative listening on that question. They agree a group response for the plenary.

Discussion in stages

In small groups, take time in silence to reflect on and/or write a response to a question. In turn, each person either speaks to the question or reads out their response. In discussion, share further thoughts arising. Agree and record a group response for the plenary. Repeat for further questions.

Pairs and fours

Start responding to a question in pairs – five minutes each to speak. Partner listens. Each pair then joins another to share their thinking – in turn or through discussion – and agree on what to record for the plenary. Find a new partner for each further round.

Ideas café

Friends each write an idea to offer or a question to ask. Take turns in groups of three or four to share these, others responding from their perspectives. At the end of that round (15 minutes or so) one person in each group stays seated (same person each round) while the others separately join different ‘stayers’. In new groups, Friends explain their idea or pose their question again. Repeat until you run out of time or new people to meet. Reflect in plenary on what you learnt.

Using a ‘talking stick’:

So called by some Native North American groups. An object, such as a shell, smooth pebble or pine cone is picked up by a speaker who must not be interrupted while holding it. The object can be picked up by anyone for their turn after it has been replaced in the centre of the circle. This method is usually most effective when linked with periods of silent worship in between contributions. The talking stick may be held briefly by a participant to signal they do not wish to make a verbal contribution.

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Worship sharing

A more reflective, more Spirit-led version of creative listening. It needs a good amount of time with more opportunity for silence after each contribution. This can be particularly "right" for potentially controversial, difficult or personal focus questions and topics. It differs from creative listening in that it is less based on thinking than on surrendering to worship and accepting what emerges. Although participants are asked to reflect on the focus questions in advance, contributions are likely to be at a deeper level, sometimes surprising to the speakers themselves. Here, it usually is best to state the issue and then start with a short period of silence (about 5 minutes) where each person moves into worship and opens themselves to the contribution they may feel called to make. People then speak in any order. Close with a period of silent worship. The emphasis is on worshipful listening

The group may agree before starting to place time limitations on each person so that everyone has a chance to speak. In this case, they should also agree how the facilitator or timekeeper will signal if a person is approaching the time limit, perhaps by holding up a book or coloured card. An object may be used as a talking stick (as above) if the group finds it helpful.

An extract from *Spiritual reviews: Reviewing the spiritual life of the meeting and its expression in caring*, Britain Yearly Meeting, Quaker Books, 2012, with additional material from *Hearts & minds prepared* study pack, Jennie Levin, Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, 2003, reproduced with permission

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