



Becoming Friends

Living & Learning with Quakers



Becoming Friends: guidance for meetings

Local or area meetings working with the Becoming Friends process will all have different needs, but we hope that meetings will consider adopting guidelines for its implementation, to ensure the best possible support for newcomers. We offer the following suggested guidelines as a resource and help for meetings (but this is not in any way meant to be an imposed structure – meetings can adapt these guidelines to their own needs).

While it is not essential to have Becoming Friends companions available in a meeting in order to offer the Becoming Friends learning materials to newcomers, experience has shown that newcomers are likely to get more from the process if they do have a companion. There will be some online companion support available for those without a local Becoming Friends companion or who prefer to work this way.

When there are no Becoming Friends companions in a meeting, it is all the more important that the meeting engages actively with the Becoming Friends process, for example by being prepared to take part in individual or group conversations with the newcomer as part of learning activities exploring Quaker experience.

1. Recruitment

Becoming Friends companions for newcomers need to be people who are familiar with the Quaker way and reasonably established in the life of the meeting.

It is recommended that Becoming Friends companions are recruited through a combination of:

- interested individuals making an offer, expressing interest or being encouraged by elders and overseers (this will, at least initially, be in response to publicity and information from the Becoming Friends project)
- discernment by elders and overseers
- a training/preparation process.

Recruitment of Becoming Friends companions need not be done through the traditional nominations route, so as not to add to the burden on the local nominations committee or create a barrier to engagement with the Becoming Friends process.

The training/preparation will be an essential last stage of the discernment process, both for the person offering to serve as a Becoming Friends companion and for the meeting.

2. Training/preparation of Becoming Friends companions

Friends offering service as Becoming Friends companions to newcomers need to prepare for the role. Just as *Advices & queries* urges us to come to meeting for worship with 'hearts and minds prepared', so it is with this service.

Courses to prepare Becoming Friends companions will be offered through events at Woodbrooke and Swarthmoor Hall, regional events and courses delivered locally with the support of experienced Becoming Friends companions or a Becoming Friends companion course handbook.

It is recommended that new Becoming Friends companions are not prepared for this role by simply undertaking it alongside an experienced Becoming Friends companion. This does not allow for the necessary challenges of self examination, discernment and reflection that will be part of the preparation process before engaging with a potentially vulnerable newcomer.

Meetings will be asked to provide a letter of support for Friends coming on the Becoming Friends companion courses, to ensure that local discernment has been made, and that the meeting is supporting those taking on this responsibility.

It will be helpful if meetings record when someone has attended a Becoming Friends companion course. This will serve as a local record and can also be provided when a companion applies to access the companions' area of the Becoming Friends online resources.

3. The process in local or area meetings

Local coordination

The Becoming Friends process for supporting newcomers will be coordinated at local or area meeting level, as fits individual meetings' circumstances. In either case, it is essential that an experienced local Friend or Friends be appointed to oversee the Becoming Friends support in that meeting. This could be done by elders and/or overseers, or a local Becoming Friends coordinator may be appointed specifically for this purpose. The meeting needs not only to arrange Becoming Friends companions for newcomers, but also any follow up and support to ensure the system works in their area.

Timing of the offer to newcomers

The appropriate point at which newcomers are offered the support of the Becoming Friends learning materials and a Becoming Friends companion will be for elders, overseers or

experienced Friends in the local meeting to discern. This offer can be made at a relatively early stage, since there is no expectation that the new attender should be thinking about membership before being offered this learning opportunity and support. Indeed, it is not intended to be linked specifically to a newcomer's decision about joining the Society. It may be that the right time to make the offer will be when a newcomer has attended a number of Quaker Quest or other outreach sessions, or when they are beginning to establish a pattern of regular attendance at meeting. Equally, it can just as well be offered when someone is thinking about membership, or has recently joined.

Choice of Becoming Friends companion

The local and area meeting will ideally have a small pool of trained/prepared Becoming Friends companions for newcomers. The newcomer will be offered a choice of companion from that pool (after checks have been made about their current availability). If a newcomer expresses a strong wish for a specific Friend who is not in the existing pool of Becoming Friends companions, that person may be offered training and preparation, if they are willing to undertake the role.

How many Becoming Friends companions per newcomer?

In most cases, one person will act as Becoming Friends companion to each newcomer, although some meetings may prefer to aim for offering two Becoming Friends companions each time.

If one Becoming Friends companion is usually offered to newcomers, there may be exceptional situations where it is appropriate for another person to be present as an additional support or safeguard. There may also be occasions when the gender of the Becoming Friends companion is an issue for the newcomer, and it is necessary to offer an additional person to address this need. In these cases, the additional person need not be a trained Becoming Friends companion. These issues will be dealt with through the careful discernment of elders and overseers, or the local coordinator.

The Becoming Friends learning materials will often provide opportunities for newcomers to find out more about aspects of Quakerism by engaging in conversations with other local Friends on given subjects, thereby encouraging an awareness of a range of Quaker views and experiences in addition to those of their Becoming Friends companion.

How many newcomers can one person support? :

To avoid overburdening Friends undertaking service as Becoming Friends companions, the number of newcomers that an individual companion can support on a 1:1 basis at any one time will be a matter for discernment by the elders and overseers or the local Becoming Friends coordinator.

It is also possible that one Becoming Friends companion could work with several newcomers at once, in particular by working as a small group.

Timescales and endings

In each case, the Becoming Friends companion and newcomer will be encouraged to decide on a timescale for their work together, according to their own needs and availability. This can be very flexible, and may range from a few weeks to several months, but it is helpful at the outset to establish a date for reviewing the process, so that it is not an open ended commitment on either part. In a situation where the companion relationship does not work out, or a Becoming Friends companion becomes unavailable, elders and overseers or the local Becoming Friends coordinator will make arrangements for an alternative Becoming Friends companion to be offered to the newcomer.

Confidentiality and openness

Conversations between the newcomer and Becoming Friends companion are confidential. It will therefore not be appropriate for either newcomer or companion to be asked to give a detailed report on their work together (although it may sometimes lead to an application for membership, when the usual local membership procedures will apply). Of course, both newcomer and companion may agree to share elements of their experience of the Becoming Friends course without divulging personal information. This may encourage others to get involved with Becoming Friends, either as newcomers or companions.

Becoming Friends companions should not invite anyone else to meetings with the newcomer they are supporting, unless this is decided together with the newcomer. There may, however, be occasions when the newcomer may wish to invite someone else along, and this choice can be discussed with their companion.

Evaluation and feedback

There is a simple evaluation form for newcomers and companions to complete at the end of their work together, which will be given to elders and overseers or the local Becoming Friends coordinator for review. This form can be downloaded from www.woodbrooke.org.uk/becomingfriends and the online Becoming Friends course or found on page 285 of the Becoming Friends course book. If meetings wish to give feedback to Woodbrooke and Quaker Life about the use of Becoming Friends in their area, the Becoming Friends project team welcomes such feedback on becoming.friends@woodbrooke.org.uk .

Support for Becoming Friends Companions

The Becoming Friends companions' network will provide resources and support for companions, including through online discussion forums. It can also be very helpful for Becoming Friends companions to receive support by:

- meeting with other Becoming Friends companions in the local or area meeting
- meeting with supporting elders and overseers or the local Becoming Friends coordinator.