



Journeys in the Spirit

inward outward upward downward

Children's work edition Issue 49 March 2011



Death and dying: Advices & Queries 30

Getting ready

There are gentle, worshipful ways to address topics that we might find uncomfortable speaking of with children. This issue suggests using a structured worshipful format known as *Way of the Child* to address the topic of death with children whether they have been bereaved, or not. This issue reflects on Advice and Query 30, the only one that mentions death. While the first question in this Advice and Query may seem unrealistic for children, unless they are ill, all children need to know it is acceptable to speak openly about death.

It is worth knowing that children of different ages respond and understand death in different ways, and do respond differently than adults. Death is a deeply spiritual issue. In preparing to do this session, take time to consider your own thoughts and feelings, and to reflect on your own experiences. If possible, share these with your co-facilitator. This will help you to concentrate on the children's feelings, thoughts and experiences.

Equipment needed

Create a sense of sacred space: a comfortable, safe and welcoming room. Avoid clutter. Use soft, pastel-coloured fabric to cover distracting bookcases. The Respond section suggests reflective 'stations' to offer a variety of ways for leading children to interior silence. It is hoped you will use them all, but set up the room with at least three with space to move between them. Alternatively, be inspired to develop suitable activities yourself remembering this is worship, not a classroom where facts need to be learned or art work produced for show and tell. See *Additional Resources Sheet 49.A* at www.quaker.org.uk/resources-children for pictures of how a 'Way of the Child' space and station might look.

Gather

Have a door keeper greet children as they come into the room. As children come in, be ready sitting calmly on a rug, speak quietly and greet each child by name as they sit. Have pictures of funerals on the rug. See *Additional Resources Sheet 49 B* at www.quaker.org.uk/resources-children Encourage children to look at the pictures and comment. They may want to share their own experiences of a funeral or bereavement. Encourage everyone to listen and to leave a pause after each comment. When all are present, remove the pictures. Remind children to sit still, breathing in and out slowly a few times. When all are calm, light a candle, and say "this is to remind us that there is that of God in each of us." Have prepared candles, each labelled with a child's name. As you light each one, have everyone join in saying that name. Light candles for children not present. Sit quietly for a moment in worship. When the gathered silence is strong, place a basket of dead dried flowers alongside some live flowers in the centre of the circle. Say, "Today, we are going to take some quiet time to think about the end of life, death. Some of you may remember a person or an animal who has died or you may have other thoughts."

"Journeys in the Spirit" offers resources and ideas to Quakers engaging with children and young people.

This children's work edition comes out monthly. It offers resources and ideas to Quakers engaging with 5 –12 year olds in a Quaker setting.

It provides opportunities for exploring, creating and learning in an atmosphere of worship in partnership on our shared journey in the spirit.

Underpinning references

Every half an hour a child in Britain loses a parent to death. The rate they lose either a grandparent, close school friend, or mentor is higher still.

Childhood Bereavement Network.

Advice & Queries 30:

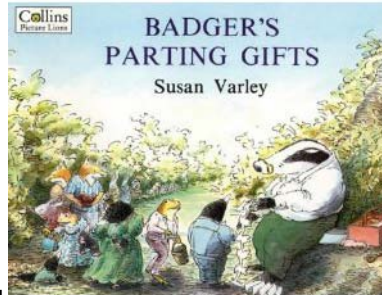
... (In) accepting the fact of death, we are freed to live more fully. In bereavement, give yourself time to grieve. When others mourn, let your love embrace them.

Engage

Here are five stories illustrating different experiences of a death. Choose one to read – get familiar with it beforehand. See the ‘*Links and Resources sheet*’ at www.quaker.org.uk/resources-children online for other stories and resource books. All the books below are available from the Quaker Centre Bookshop to buy and from Quaker Centre to borrow in person or by post – see sidebar for contact details.

On *Additional Sheet 49.C* online there is a story called ‘*My cat and me*’ that can be printed out to use in Children’s Meeting.

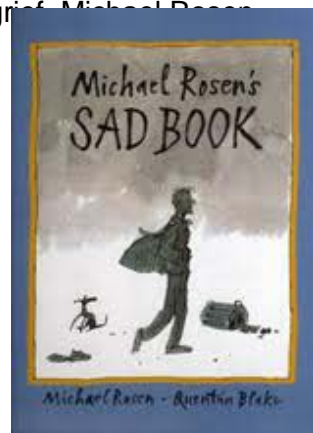
Badgers parting gifts. When old Badger dies, his friends think they will be sad forever. But gradually they are able to remember Badger with joy and to treasure the gifts he left behind for every one of his friends.



Always and Forever. How a community responds and deals with the death of a well loved friend. When fox dies, his friends think that they will never get over their great sadness. Through the winter a great heavy silence affects them all. When spring comes, they together begin to remember the funny things Fox used to do, and they realise he is still in their hearts and memories, and will be always and forever.

The tenth good thing about Barney. One child’s very real perspective of the death of a pet. With loving support a mother encourages the boy to think about ten good things about his dog in preparation for the next day’s funeral. This helps the boy to address common feelings and thought that accompany grief.

Michael Rosen’s Sad Book. Sharing the emotion of grief. Michael Rosen is an author some children might recognise – gives a heartfelt honest account of his personal grief and how he copes with it. Quentin Blake, also easily recognised by some, provides expressive, emotive illustrations.



After a story, ask the children “I wonder” questions. Just listen to and accept whatever answers or silence greets your wondering:

I wonder, what part of this story you like the best.

I wonder, what part of the story you think is the most important.

I wonder, if there is any part of this story that might be in you or that you are in.

I wonder, if there is any part of this story that you would like to leave out and still have all the story you need.

I wonder, if you are thinking of someone you know or have known.

After the conversation acknowledge that they may have been looking at the ‘stations’ set up around the room. Guide everyone round and show them each ‘station’. Remind them to respect others who will use the space and to tidy up before they leave a station to move elsewhere or gather together at the end of the meeting. Ask that they don’t crowd the different areas – if one place has the allotted number move to another. When you have shown each area invite everyone to sit quietly together – when you judge the time is right ask the children to go to a ‘station’.

References & other resources

Quaker Centre and bookshop:
0207 663 1030 and
www.quaker.org.uk/quaker-centre

Advice and query 30 is relevant to all, what ever their age. As children’s psychologist, Alan Wolfelt (1991), said, “Anyone old enough to love is old enough to grieve.”

Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine
Crossley Diana (2000)
Gloucestershire:
Hawthorn Press.
ISBN:
1869890582.
For 5 to 10 years.
Child friendly cartoons

See **Luke 1:78-79**
about light and darkness

For an additional activity about how to talk Quaker funerals and memorial meetings look at *Additional Sheet 49D* online.

Additional Resources 49. C and 49.D available at:
www.quaker.org.uk/resources-children

References & other resources

Respond is adapted from *The Way of the Child* which recognises that children have an innate spirituality with a natural acceptance of mystery, an amazing capacity for awe, a vital imagination, a longing to be their unique selves, and an ability to be open to and receive God's love.
<http://www.companionsinchrist.org/WOC/about.html>

Dyregrov, A. (2008) **Grief in Children** (2nd edition). ISBN: 978-1-84310-612-8. and **Grief in Young Children**. ISBN: 978-1-84310-65 London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers. Easy to read informative resources with practical suggestions and case studies to show that helping a child, whatever the age, through grief is manageable and rewarding.

Respond

All stations are on the floor on a blanket, or at a table. The written 'guides' below should be beside each station – you would have read them when the children toured the stations. Signal every five minutes or so when it is time to move on to a different station. Children can stay at a chosen station. Only have resources for the number of children who can sit at a station e.g. 3 children can comfortably fit at station, then only three scissors, etc. Remind children to move quietly - say how much time they have – have at least 15 minutes available for station time. Leave 10 minutes at the end for 'moving to reflect'. Below are 6 ideas for 'stations', you can make up more yourself. Have a basket of small stones for the Reflect time.

Gazing station

Resources: small woven cotton rugs rolled and placed in a basket; basket of icons and symbols (small cross, peace symbol, heart, colourful stones, crystal prisms, etc.); small candles in safe holders and candle snuffers. Have a few more symbols than rugs and same number of candles as rugs.

Guide: Choose a rug. Unroll it and place it on the floor. Choose an item from the basket and place it on the rug. Place the candle on the rug and ask an adult to light it for you. Sit and make your body silent. Breathe slowly; rest. Let your thoughts float away. Listen to God.

Sand station

Resources: large plastic containers (cat litter-trays work) holding sanitised sand with a child-sized short handled rake (wooden or bamboo back-scratchers work). Place three good-sized rocks in one basket and small, smooth stones in another. Provide a small dustpan and brush for clean up. Children generally like the tactile character of this station and it is a popular station.

Guide: Rake the sand and arrange the stones. Breathe, rest. Let your thoughts float away. Listen to God.

Craft: cards station

Resources: at table or on blanket --scissors; regular and coloured pencils; glue; symbols for tracing and cutting out (e.g. cross, heart, dove, butterfly); blank cards, a variety of paper (tracing paper, card and white paper cut into various straight-edge sizes) all neatly laid out in baskets or boxes. Keep the number of sheets of paper to a minimum, less is better.

Guide: Breathe, rest. Let your thoughts, feelings and memories flow using the materials here. Listen to God.

Journaling station

Resources: small note books, pencils, rubbers.

Guide: Choose a personal journal. Write your name on it. Write a letter to God about your thoughts, feelings, concerns. Ask God any questions on your mind.

Nature station

Resources: bowl with small ball of clay or play dough, card board to work on and move creation, small bowls of nature: dried flowers, sticks, shells.

Guide: Breathe, rest. Let your thoughts, feelings and memories flow using the materials here. Listen to God.

Book corner station

Resources: Blanket, pillows, cuddly soft toys. A basket of books for different ages perhaps including adult and children's bibles and books listed in Engage. Include Quaker Faith & Practice and Advice & Queries,

Guide: Breathe, rest, be comfortable. Choose a book. Read and reflect. If you are reading with someone else, use a quiet voice.

Moving to Reflect

When it is nearly time to come together, quietly go to each station and let the children know it is time to return the materials to their proper place and to put their creations in their folder. If they are not finished, hopefully you will have these stations again. Invite everyone to sit together for the transition to Reflect.

Reflect

Invite children to share briefly (only because of time limit) “any thoughts or feelings” they may have. Do not ask them to “show” what they “have done”.

When talking quietly and calmly is done: remind children “We have practised making our bodies and minds silent. Silence helps us think and listen to ourselves, others and God. Let us practice again.” Gaze at the candle for a moment, then say, “We lit this candle to remind us that God is with us and within us. Remember this is so, even as I blow it out.” (Pause and extinguish it). Continue, “A candle was lit for each child here and for those unable to be with us today, but they remain in our hearts. As this meeting for worship draws to a close, I will extinguish their candle. Join me in saying their name.” Then, if your children’s meeting joins the adults, remind children “While we join the adults in their worship let us continue our silence with them.”

When each child leaves meeting or the Meeting room, hand that child a small stone, and say, “God is with you and in you.”

Review

The review can happen at the time or later but facilitators may well feel they need to speak to someone immediately after the session, especially if personal memories have been awoken.

It may be helpful to inform parents and overseers of the Children’s Meeting theme so they are forewarned that children may raise related issues, thoughts and questions with them.

Be aware that you may not know what each child gained from the meeting. Queries to consider for yourself and with others: Do you think the meeting was worshipful? Did it respect the Quaker testimonies – equality, peace, simplicity, truth? Were children able to participate in their own way, helping and respecting each other? Did facilitators and children feel peaceful? What went really well and what might you do differently another time? Would you facilitate another children’s meeting for worship? If not, you may wish to discuss this with an overseer. Do you keep simple records of the meeting, e.g. a notebook including who attended, their ages and the focus of worship and some helpful points from your review? This may help in planning future meetings for children’s worship.

This issue was written by Eugene Nanning, Quaker and bereavement counsellor; edited by Chris Nickolay with the support of Howard Nurden. The Topical Activity was written by Chris Nickolay

The next children’s issue of *Journeys in the Spirit* is **Issue 50** and is about Advices and Queries 32 & 36 (*dealing with conflict*) and is available on April 1st. **Issue 51** is about Advices and Queries 33 (*being aware of discrimination and helping make a just, kind society*) and is available on May 2nd. **Issue 52** is the first of the next series entitled, ‘More Quaker Stories’ and is about Jack Hoyland, a Quaker who was close to Gandhi and also made lots of small teddy bears to raise money for Quaker projects.

Materials available online for this issue are:

Current issue additional Resources Sheets

An easy to use plan for a Children’s Meeting

A simple plan for an all age Meeting for Worship

A topical activity – children and Egypt

Also a ‘How to use *Journeys in the Spirit*’ guide; a link to special issues; an archive of previous issues; a discussion forum and a link to the *Journeys in the Spirit* Youth edition:

www.quaker.org.uk/journeyschildren

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Journeys in the Spirit

Children's work

Additional Resources



Getting Ready

'Way of the Child' space & station





Journeys in the Spirit

Children's work

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Gather

Pictures to do with funerals







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Engage

A story. 'My cat and me'

Once upon a time there was a child. The child lived at home with their family. The child had a cat who was very special. The cat had been in the family since she was tiny and very fluffy – just a kitten.

The cat had grown to be quite big. She had beautiful grey and white fur and lovely green, shiny eyes.

The cat often played with string, a little toy mouse or a ball. She would run up and down the stairs and chase the child. Sometimes the cat would jump up and hold on to the child's leg. She could be naughty.

When the child came home from school the cat would come to say hello and rub against the child's legs.

In the evening the cat would curl up on the child's bed. She would go to sleep and lie there, purring, as the child went to sleep. In the morning the cat would sometimes lick the child's face and wake her up – this tickled.

The child loved the cat – she was special.

Now, one day, the cat didn't come to say hello when the child came home from school. Where was she?

She was curled up on the child's bed. She was sleeping and didn't want to play – not even a little bit. She didn't even want to be stroked – her tummy seemed to hurt. The child knew she was ill. The child was very worried.

The child's dad took the cat to the cat doctor – the vet; the child went too.

The vet was very kind and gentle. She said that the cat was very, very poorly – not just a little bit. The vet was sad and sorry because there was nothing she could do to make the cat better. This happens sometimes.

The child and the dad took the cat home. She was given a special basket with a blanket for sleeping in the child's bedroom. She slept and slept until one evening, when the child and the dad were sitting next to her, the cat very quietly stopped breathing. She had died.

The child cried and cried; the dad cried too. They talked about what to do. The child found a box with a lid and decorated it with pictures and words. The dad dug a hole under a tree in the garden. The child put the cat and her blanket into the box – she stroked the cat one more time. The lid was put on the box. The child carried the box to the garden and put it into the hole. The dad covered the hole with earth. The child put some flowers on top of the earth. The child and the dad were still and quiet together. Then they went indoors.

Chris Nickolay



Journeys in the Spirit

Children's work

Additional Resources



Engage Ways to talk about Quaker funerals

What is a Quaker funeral? Speaking quietly, reverently. Introduce the theme of Quaker funerals, briefly in your own words.

You may wish to explain that it is like a Meeting for Worship but it is specifically to remember the person who has died and is known as *"Meeting for Worship in Thanksgiving for the Grace of God, as shown in the life of (name of deceased)"*.

So, unlike a regular Meeting for Worship, in a Quaker funeral, when everyone is settled, a Friend will stand and explain how this Meeting is done so those who have never attended a Meeting like this before will know what to expect.

Then, as usual, everyone sits in silence. Just as in a regular Meeting for Worship, anyone - Quaker or not - who feels moved by the Spirit may speak.

At a Quaker funeral, ministry would likely be a memory, prayer or reading relating to the person who has died. The focus is on how they have lived and the affect their life has had on others. This is what is meant by "the grace of God as shown in the life of ..."

You may want to mention that Quaker mourners tend not to wear black. Perhaps this is a reflection on being thankful for having known the person in life and wanting to celebrate that life. A coffin may be in the middle of a Meeting for Worship – see photo at the end of *Additional Sheet 49.B*. Below is an example of an array of different dolls that could be used to talk about a Quaker or other funeral.

