



Journeys in the Spirit

inward outward upward downward

Children's work edition June 2013 Issue 76



Five feelings: talking about sadness

Getting ready

There is something very natural about the desire to protect children from sadness and we do it in a number of ways. We do it by avoidance, steering clear of those things that might be upsetting, we do it by 'cheering up', by saying that it isn't all that bad, that things pass. We do it by distraction, by pointing towards something a bit more cheerful. All of these are natural and instinctive responses, largely because that's what adults did with us when we were sad as children. What we rarely do is just to sit with a child, acknowledge the seriousness of their sadness and simply look at the feeling with them.

Avoidance, cheering up and diversion become hard-wired into our brains as the ways to deal with sadness. Being able to admit it, to acknowledge its seriousness and to name it and spend a bit of time with it are vital skills for our spiritual and mental health. This becomes more so as we grow older and our sadnesses become more various and complex (though not more serious).

Understanding that sadness is real, that we feel it for good reason and that it is part of all our lives helps us to find a place for it, to live with it and to realise that we are not alone in it.

This issue of *Journeys in the Spirit* offers some suggestions of how we might offer children the opportunity to talk about what makes them sad and to explore the importance of acknowledging and talking about it. It is, unavoidably, a delicate and difficult thing to do and all of this requires great sensitivity. Some children (and adults) may find it distressing (though it isn't intended to be so) and it needs to happen in an atmosphere of safety and trust.

Gather

Before you gather, try to be aware of any particular issues (especially a recent loss or unexpected change) that may affect the way some children might respond to this topic.

Being still

When everyone has been welcomed have some time to be still. Out of this stillness, ask everyone there to share something good that has happened during their week, something that has made them happy, that they liked. Perhaps ask about something or someone they particularly love.

From this, introduce the idea that today we are going to think a little about those things that don't make us happy; the things that make us feel sad. Assure them that they don't have to say or share anything that they don't want to, be sensitive to how very differently children will respond to this.

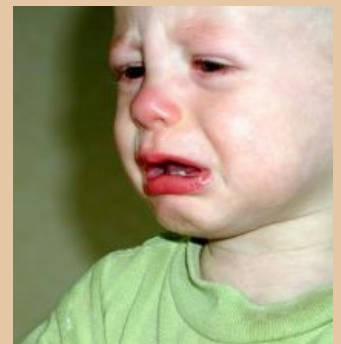
Journeys in the Spirit offers resources and ideas to Quakers engaging with children and young people.

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

Advice and Queries
1:18



Engage

Rosie and the rose. *Tell the following story:*

Every day, when Rosie came out of school, Nan was there to meet her; always the same bright smile and the same twinkle in her blue eyes. And always a different exciting surprise in the deep pocket of her blue cardigan.

When Rosie saw her she felt her heart open up like a rose turning towards the sun, blossoming and opening its petals. All the way home Rosie would talk and talk about what she'd been doing during the day and Nan would listen and laugh or frown or just nod. When they got home there would be painting and playing and baking to do; or sometimes they would sit and Nan would tell Rosie stories about her own childhood and their family. And all the time, the flower of Rosie's heart smiled in the sunshine.

One day, quite unexpectedly, it was Mum who met Rosie from school instead of Nan. 'Nan's in hospital' mum said, 'she's been quite poorly and Dad is with her'. Over the next weeks, they would visit Nan each evening and each evening she seemed more fragile and a little further away. Then, one day, it was Dad who met Rosie from school. 'Rosie, love, I'm afraid Nan has gone. She was just too tired and frail and she couldn't go on'.

Rosie felt something terrible happening to the flower in her heart; it began to fold in and close shut. At first it felt numb, then, after a few days it felt hot, white hot, like a fire; then it was sharp and jagged like the flower had become a thorn; then it was icy cold; then the little flower of her heart felt blown and battered and fragile. Rosie feared that the flower would die. She didn't know how to tell anyone or explain it; Mum had gone very quiet and she could see that Dad had been crying. She wanted her heart to feel safe. She imagined a box, beautiful and strong and secure. She imagined taking her heart, like a flower, and putting it into the box to keep it safe. She closed the lid of the box, locked it, and put it where no one would find it. For a while it felt okay; it didn't hurt any more; she wasn't raw or angry or afraid. But she wasn't happy either, she didn't laugh or smile. Or play. She often felt cold, and usually alone.

Then, one day, quite unexpectedly, in the middle of doing something else, she remembered Nan's smile, her bright smile. And Rosie started to cry, properly cry, like it would never stop. But, even as she cried, she found she was smiling. She was remembering Nan and she was smiling...and crying. Before she knew what she was doing, she found that the box she had imagined was opening. Inside it the flower, that had become so fragile and battered, was opening up, it was opening its petals to the sun. It hurt – a lot – but it felt good too. It felt alive. So she decided to show someone. She told Dad. 'Dad' she said, 'I had to keep my heart like a rose in a safe box. Just now I thought about Nan and her smile; at first I cried, but I think the tears must have watered the rose I feel like it's coming alive again and I can bring it back out again.'

Dad smiled. 'It's beautiful, Rosie' he said. 'Can I hold you for a little while'? And he hugged Rosie. And his tears were like water too.

Pause for a few moments

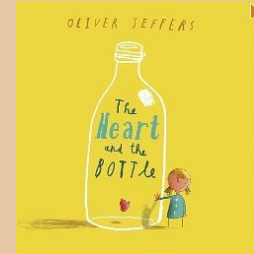
Ask the children about how the story affected them. Discuss their thoughts about: What did Rosie first do about her sadness? How did she try to keep her heart safe? How did begin to love and live again?

Then talk about what we do when we feel sadness. Ask some of these further questions: What are the things that make us sad? Is it losing something or someone special? Is it being away from people we love? Why do these things make us sad? How does our sadness *feel*? Are we angry, afraid and lonely? What do we do when we are sad? Can we talk about it? To whom?

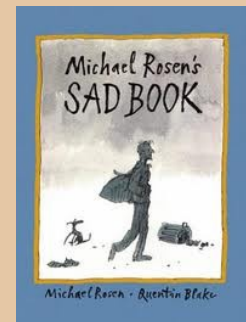
It is important to admit that it is not always possible to take sadness away or pretend it isn't there. Sometimes we need to admit it to ourselves and to someone who we trust and who knows us and cares for us. Talk about three things that we might do to help us cope with our sadness: Looking at it. Talking about it. Finding a safe place to put it.

References & other resources

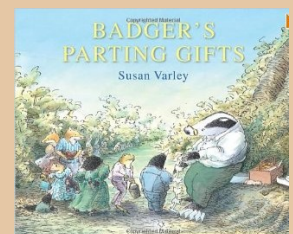
The Heart in a bottle by Oliver Jeffers



The Sad Book by Michael Rosen



Badger's parting gifts by Susan Varley



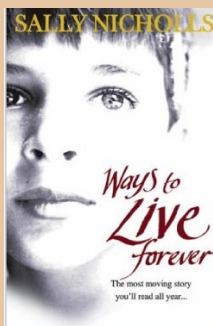
All available from the Quaker Bookshop

020 7663 1030

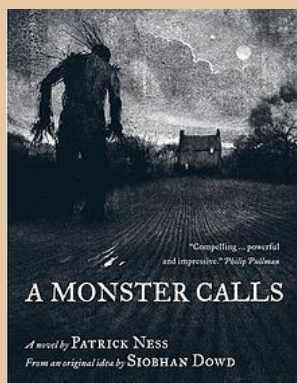
References & other resources

For older children:

Ways to live forever by Sally Nicholls



A Monster Calls by Patrick Ness



Books available from the Quaker Bookshop

'Up' by Pixar films



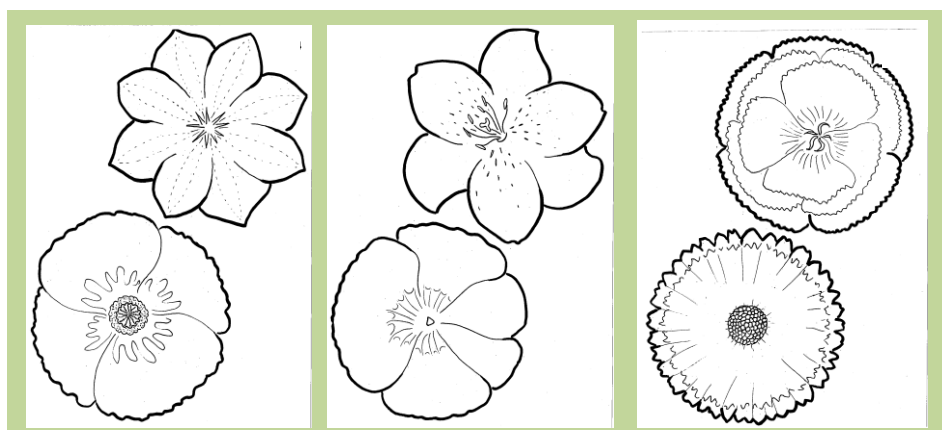
Additional Resource 76.A can be found at:
www.quaker.org.uk/resources-children

Respond

Sad flowers

Resources needed for the first two ideas in written in Respond: Copies of the flower pictures on Additional Resource 76.A; drawing and colouring pencils; scissors; coloured and black felt pens for writing and colouring; small wax crayons; pva glue; a variety of magazine pictures; small plain craft boxes (available from local art shops or bigger stores like Hobbycraft) or shoe boxes.

Use the flower templates on Additional Resource 76.A and ask the children to write something on the shape or a petal that makes them feel sad. Just a word (or even a name) will do. Encourage them to colour the flowers in.



Safe places

Each person in the group chooses a box and then decorates the outside with pictures of things that make them happy and that make them feel safe. The decoration can be done using cut out magazine pictures or just drawn on.

Ask them (perhaps in smaller groups) to talk about what is on each of the petals they have written or drawn on and then place it in their safe box and give it to someone to hold quietly for just a few moments after which it is to be given back .

This is what we can do with our sadness: name it, share it, and find a way to keep it safe.

One of the most alarming things about sadness is that it feels so overwhelming. The box gives a sense of being able to contain it and asking someone to hold it for us reminds us that we are not alone with it.

Talk to the children about who they might ask to hold their box for them at home to keep it safe.



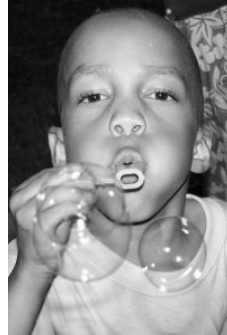
'Up' by Pixar films. This film is about loving someone, sadness, having adventures, helping others. It is a lovely animated film. It is also often funny. Rent or buy the film. The children could watch this over two or more sessions together. A session of film watching could be followed with some talk about the film and what children thought about it followed by some simple ball games outside of the meetinghouse.

Reflect

How did thinking about sadness make us feel? Reflect on the importance of talking about the things that make us feel sad.

Take some time at the end to come back to the things that make us happy, too. If it has been a difficult session, have some quiet time to think about and share something we are looking forward to in the coming week.

End by quietly giving thanks for each other and all of the good things in our lives.



Review

How did the children respond to this difficult subject? Were they all able to take part?

Were some children too upset to really participate? Are there parents/carers you may need to talk to afterwards?

How did you feel? Did it touch difficult memories and stories for you?



This issue was written by Alistair Fuller and edited by Chris Nickolay and Howard Nurden. Chris Nickolay wrote the Topical activity.

Issue 77 will give ways to wonder about and explore anger. Available from 1 July 2013.

Issue 78 will offer ways to think and talk about love. Available from 1 August 2013.

Issue 79 will be about the feeling of fear and how to talk about and deal with it. Available from 2 September 2013.

Materials available online 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 – this time about Meeting for worship for all ages at Yearly Meeting this year

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.

Go to:

www.quaker.org.uk/journeyschildren and choose from the range of links in the sidebar.

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Children's work

Additional resources 76.A

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