



Journeys in the Spirit

inward outward upward downward

Children's work edition March 2019 Issue 120



Room for All: Mental Wellbeing

Getting ready

This edition of *Journeys in the Spirit* continues the theme of 'Room for More' and focusses on children's mental well-being. Past issues of *Journeys in the Spirit* cover a number of specific issues to do with mental welfare e.g. bereavement, exploring emotions, but this issue is about the whole person and what helps us to maintain good healthy minds. Being aware of how others are mentally and emotionally is important in making our Quaker communities feel welcoming and all inclusive. How do we support each other and the children in our care? Are we aware of the difficulties some families are experiencing? We need to enable children to build up their resilience to cope with the problems they face in today's world. What support and strategies can we give them to help them do this?

This edition of *Journeys in the Spirit* offers some simple ideas to help children to understand better why they feel as they do, that they are not alone when things are difficult and there are ways to boost their self-esteem. Some ideas may be helpful for adults too, and it may be worth taking some time for yourself to think about your own mental well-being. What helps you to cope with the stresses and strains of life? Perhaps some of your own strategies or experience can help children – be willing to share this with the children. There is a sheet with some helpful tips for adults (*Additional resource 120.A – see link in the sidebar on p.3*)

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 years 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.

Gather

Prepare the room in advance arranging chairs or cushions in a circle. Allow yourself and other helpers to have a moment of quiet together before welcoming the children.

Start with introductions, everyone to have go-round and say their name. There may be children who don't know each other.

Arrange the pictures "safe places" (*see the sidebar on p.3 for a link to Additional resource 120.B*) in the middle of the circle. As well as pictures there may be objects you would like to use such as a teddy bear or another favourite toy.

Start with a short period of quiet and then invite the children and adults to choose a picture or object. When everyone has chosen ask the children if they would like to share why they have chosen their particular picture or object. What does a "safe place" mean to them.

Underpinning references

Hide, or show your true self.

Doubt or believe in your personal self-worth.

Remain silent or allow the wisdom and awareness within you to awaken.

Your natural being awaits you.

The power of faith, trust and purpose awaits you.

Engage

Huge bag of Worries

What happens when we worry about lots of things? How does it make us feel? Do we feel able to talk to others about our worries? Sometimes we have big worries that might make us sad and at other times they may be silly little worries that we can't get out of our heads. However sometimes they rather get in the way of what we would like to be doing. We are going to listen to a story about a little girl who had such a huge bag of worries she didn't know what to do with them. Read the story of the Huge Bag of Worries (see sidebar opposite).

My Many Coloured Days

It is important for children to recognise they have times when they don't feel so good. These may be days when they might feel sad or angry or frustrated. It is also important to acknowledge that children do not always know why they feel as they do. Indeed, there may be no explanation as to why they feel as they do.

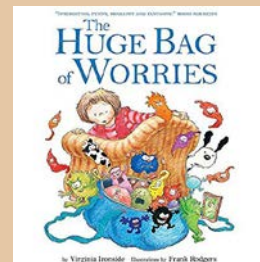
Dr. Seuss's book My Many Coloured Days (see sidebar opposite) describes some of these feelings as colours in a very simple book. Being able to express feelings as colours or sounds or shapes can help children to off load some of the feelings that hamper them. Share this book with children.

Michael Rosen's Sad Book

Children often display a range of emotions without really understanding why they feel as they do. The angry truculent child is not necessarily being difficult but feeling confused by a range of emotions. The child may not be able to relate it to what is happening to them in their life. For example, a child who is being bullied at school may not associate that with feelings of anger and frustration. A child who is weepy and sad and not wanting to talk to anyone may not relate this to feelings of loss over family break up or loss of a grandparent. Michael Rosen's Sad Book (see sidebar opposite) was written in response to the loss of his son but he talks and explores feelings very openly. This may help children to realise that talking about feelings can be very helpful in enabling them to better understand why they might be feeling as they do. Share this book with the children.

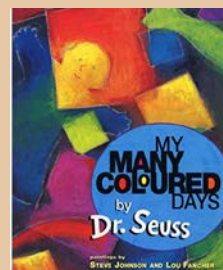


References & other resources



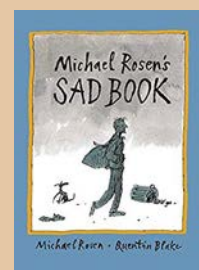
The Huge Bag of Worries

ISBN 978-0-340-90317-9



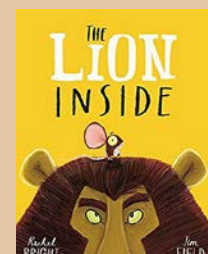
My Many Coloured Days by Dr. Seuss

ISBN 0-09-926659-8



Michael Rosen's Sad Book

ISBN 0-7445-9898-2



The Lion Inside Rachel Bright

ISBN 978-1-40833-160-6

References & other resources

Books are available from the Quaker Bookshop
020 7663 1030 / 1031
quakercentre@quaker.org.uk
<http://bookshop.quaker.org.uk>

Additional Resources A-E, All Age Meeting for Worship and Games supplement are available here:

<http://www.quaker.org.uk/children-and-young-people/work-quaker-setting/resources-children/journeys-child#heading-1>

Respond

How we deal with our worries and anxieties

Following reading The Huge Bag of Worries story, ask the children about their worries. They might be willing to talk about them right away. If not, suggest they write or draw their worries on post-it notes - one worry per post-it note. Encourage the children to share their worries. This is important as often sharing a worry makes it feel less of a problem. They may find others have the same worries and that can be a relief. There may be some worries that they can get rid of right away - just sharing them makes them go away.

Put the rest in a big bag (*Additional resource 120.C see sidebar*). This might be one you have drawn on a big piece of paper or an actual bag. Once the worries are in the bag decide what to do with the bag and the worries. Throw them away? Lock them in a cupboard?

Using creativity to express feelings

Following reading the story *My Many Coloured Days* by Dr. Seuss. Talk with the children about the story and ask them if they ever see how they feel as different colours. Suggest that drawing, painting, writing can help to express how they feel. This is particularly helpful for children who don't want to talk about their feelings. Look at the sheet (*Additional Resource 120.D*) with the children's paintings, drawings and writing and talk a little about these asking the children which ones they like. (They were done by young people from Scotland in response to sessions looking at the Israel/Palestine conflict). Provide a variety of art materials for children to experiment with - just enabling them to use whatever medium they choose to create something that expresses them. Quite simply they might want to write, draw or paint a favourite experience, story, toys - anything that comes to mind. No constraints!

Expressing feelings safely through use of puppets

Following reading the story *Michael Rosen's Sad Book* you may want to have a little time to talk with the children about the story but we mustn't expect or ask children to pour out how they feel. Instead say they are going to make some little puppets, each with a different feeling (sad, happy, angry, frustrated, tired, bouncy and many more). Maybe two or three puppets each (*see Additional resource 120.E in sidebar for lollipop puppets*). Photocopy a few sheets. These can be cut out and stuck on to a lollipop stick. Or you can make your own. Ask them to give their puppets a name, who they are and what they do - a little story about their puppets. And then share their stories with everyone in the group.

Boosting our self-esteem and resilience

The suggested All Age Worship (*see sidebar for details*) addresses the issue of self-esteem and resilience. It is not only important for children but adults as well so this activity lends itself well to all age meeting for worship. This uses the book *The Lion Inside* (*see sidebar*).



Reflect

At the end of the session have some time for the children to ask any questions. There may be issues that have arisen as a result of the subject and children need clarification if there are things they have not understood.

Mental well-being affects all of us, so there may be some sensitive issues that raise particular questions or personal experience that children want to talk about. Ensure they are able to do this with you or other appropriate adults. You may want to let parents know the topic in advance in case children want to talk to parents at home about the session.

Children may like to share with the adults in meeting what they have been thinking about and done. Consider how you might do this giving plenty of time. It may be more appropriate for children to do this with a small number of adults rather than the whole meeting.

Review

The review can happen at the time or later but volunteers may well feel they need to speak to someone immediately after the session, particularly if any children have experienced mental health difficulties themselves or within the family.

For yourself reflect on how the session went. Did the children participate well? Did they learn some strategies for boosting their self-esteem and self-confidence? Are there things you might have done differently? Is it worth discussing these things with other volunteers and at Children's Committee?

It may be worth thinking about how this edition of Journeys in the Spirit is part of a series entitled 'Room for More'. Mental well-being affects all of us so approaching this topic as all age worship plan may be a very important way to engage the whole meeting.

This issue was written by Madeleine Harding and edited by Mel Cook and Howard Nurden.

Journeys in the Spirit is published in two formats on alternative months. One month the issue is on a theme, with an easy to use structure set out in a four page booklet with additional online resources. The alternative month is a topical activity – something about the news or of a seasonal interest.

Available from 1 April 2019: Topical Activity - Service

Available from 1 May 2019 Gardening

Materials available online are:

Additional Resources Sheets

An easy to use plan for a Children's Meeting

A simple plan for an all age Meeting for Worship

These can be accessed through

www.quaker.org.uk/journeyschildren by scrolling down to 'resources for current issue'.

For a 'How to use Journeys in the Spirit guide', the catalogue of previous issues and a link to the resources for recent issues, go to www.quaker.org.uk/journeyschildren and scroll down to find what you want.

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Journeys in the Spirit

Children's work

Additional resource 120.A

Getting Ready

Tips for adults



Some useful tips and ideas to enable children to cope with stress, anxiety and other mental health issues

According to the Mental Health Foundation (<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/>), nearly one in ten children and young people aged five to sixteen are affected by a mental health problem. The good news is that early identification of signs of anxiety or depression, along with positive intervention, can prevent small problems become big issues as a child grows and develops. Equipping children with an invaluable set of coping mechanisms and relaxation and distraction skills, that they can tap into at any time, will strengthen their resolve and give them the confidence to take on some of life's less welcome challenges. Indeed, looking after one's mental health is as important as looking after one's physical health, so any child is likely to benefit from learning straightforward relaxation techniques and perhaps, being open to the practice of mindfulness.

How to spot the signs of anxiety in children

When anxious children cannot always express or understand what they are feeling.

Signs of anxiety may include:

- Having bad dreams
- Not sleeping well or waking in the night
- Wetting the bed
- Becoming irritable, tearful, or clingy
- Difficulty concentrating
- Angry outbursts
- Eating problems
- Signs of diminishing confidence with everyday tasks.



Mindfulness

Briefly, this is about being present in the moment - stopping and being aware of your thoughts, environment and body. It is possible to improve mental well-being by paying more attention to the present moment. Rather than losing touch with the way your body is feeling and being caught up in your thoughts, the practice of mindfulness develops an awareness to help reconnect your thoughts and feelings with your body. This awareness to see the present moment clearly, makes it possible to positively change the way you see yourself and your life.

Basic mindfulness-based exercises for children

1. Learn active listening - ring a bell or singing bowl, and ask your child/children to listen closely to the vibration of the ringing sound and to keep quiet until they no longer hear those sounds.
2. Pay attention to the breath - any kind of meditative exercise involves paying attention to the breath. A good way for a child to pay attention to their breathing is to lie on the floor with a cuddly toy placed on the tummy. As your child breathes in and out they can silently watch teddy moving up and down whilst also being aware of anything else that they can see, hear or feel.
3. Focus on the positive - take time every day to find and name three things you or your child are grateful for. We often spend so much time yearning and craving, that we forget all the things we do have.

Useful helplines:

Headspace website: <https://www.headspace.com/meditation/kids> - fun ways to learn about the basics of mindfulness.

Young Minds free parent helpline: on 0808 802 5544. Open Monday to Friday 9.30am-4.00pm.

