

SECTION 6: GROUP EXERCISES

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6. GROUP EXERCISES

1. Sowing the seeds of action

Aim

The aim of this exercise is to help participants explore the values that inspire them to take action.

Timing

You can adapt this exercise depending on the time allowed. If you only have 20 minutes you could probably address one or two of the questions. To look at all of them you will probably need about an hour.

Materials

Flipchart paper and pens.

Preparation

Write up the questions below on the flipchart paper. Make sure you write them clearly in large letters and that you position the paper where everyone can read it.

Process

- * Invite people to move into groups of two or three.
- * Explain to the groups that they are going to read five questions, in turn, and then reflect and discuss on them in their groups.
- * Then ask the group to share around the first question, giving them 10–20 minutes (depending on how much time you have available). Warn them when you are a few minutes away from the end of the allotted time.
- * You may want to encourage Friends to work in worship-sharing mode. See page 77 for guidance on worship sharing.
- * Repeat the process for the second, third, fourth and fifth questions.

The questions

1. What makes you glad to be alive on this earth?
2. What do you really need and what do you value most in your life?
3. What in society helps you to meet those needs and values, and what makes it difficult?
4. How does your Quaker involvement support or challenge your needs and values?
5. Your needs and values are the seeds that can lead you to act and to try to build a world in which these values flourish. What kind of nourishment do your seeds need to flower?

Worship sharing (10 minutes)

After the groups have discussed all five questions (or as many as you have time for) come together as a whole group to share.

Explain that you are now going to gather in worship to reflect on what you have been discussing. Remind the group that each person should have a chance to speak once, if they wish, and to leave a small silence after someone speaks, before they do.

2. Exploring the challenges that face us

Aim

This exercise is intended to give Friends the space to speak of their true reactions and responses to the plight of the world, with others acting as witness. It can be enlightening both to those who do not feel strongly or who know they feel detached or numb, and, conversely, to those who experience their feelings as strong, needing expression, or getting in their way. For people who do not identify with either of these states, it can be a powerful witnessing experience.

This exercise is based on the 'Truth Mandala' exercise from Joanna Macy and Molly Young Brown in *Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World* (New Society Publishers, 1998).

Facilitators' note

This exercise is a bit more challenging, both to facilitate and potentially for participants. Make sure you feel comfortable with the text and process before you start, and explain to people that the exercise is intended to bring up emotions and that they should be prepared for that.

Timing

You should allow at least an hour for this exercise, though the time needed will depend on the number of people in the group.

Materials

A stone – in this exercise this will represent fear.

A handful of dry leaves – in this exercise these will represent grief, sorrow and sadness.

A stick – in this exercise this will represent anger. It is not for hitting but for grasping tightly with both hands.

An empty bowl – in this exercise this will represent absence, a sense of deprivation or need, our hunger or our numbness.

A small rug, or similar.

Preparation

If you are going to facilitate this session familiarise yourself with the aim section above.

Familiarise yourself with the meaning of the different objects.

Lay the rug on the floor, and place one object at each corner. Hope, and other positive emotions, is the space in the middle of the rug.

Position a circle of chairs around the rug (one for each person).

“I saw also that there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an infinite ocean of light and love, which flowed over the ocean of darkness.”

George Fox, 1647,
Quaker faith & practice 19.03

6. GROUP EXERCISES

Process

- * Ask people to take a place in the circle. Introduce the exercise. You may want to just read out the aim, or say it in your own words. Explain that the purpose of the objects is to help us voice the truth of our own experience. Each object represents an aspect of our feeling life. Then introduce each object, using the list above to explain what each one means.
- * Explain that each person can go into the centre and pick up one of the objects, choosing the one that represents their dominant feeling of the moment. They can then stand with their objects and speak about what they are feeling. When they have finished they place the object back where they found it. Let people know that they can speak with more than one object. If they are feeling hopeful, or another positive emotion, they can simply stand on the rug without picking up an object. Explain that there should then be a pause, as in worship sharing, before someone else moves to the centre.
- * Tell people that there is no expectation that they actively take part and that witnessing is just as important, but that there will be time for everyone to partake at least once, should they wish to.
- * Ask the group for a commitment to confidentiality.
- * Explain that there will be a period of silence at the beginning and someone can start when they are ready. Say that you will give notice before the last few minutes that the process is coming to an end, and that you will end with a period of receptive silent worship.
- * Then enter the silence.
- * As you approach the end of the allocated time, or when you feel that the group energy is changing and the time has come to finish, invite anyone who still wishes to participate and has not yet done so to enter the circle.

Worship

Make sure you end the process with a few minutes of silent worship or worship sharing.

3. A story of the fragile Earth

This is a story told in what is called the Godly Play style. What is offered is a simple script, simple instructions and open questions to use for everybody to explore the story's meaning for themselves.

The story begins with the laying out of a soft black cloth that represents the universe before anything was formed. Then come the stars. Then comes a small blue planet – water, sky, earth, creatures and people. Then come the things that go bump in the night – pollution from planes and cars, chemicals and war. Then the helpers appear.

The instructions and script for telling the story, details of the simple equipment needed and how to set up a reflective and creative space are all available at:

www.quaker.org.uk/sustainability

A story kit can be borrowed from the Quaker Life Children and Young People's work team (see Additional Support and Resources for contact details). At least one month's notice is required. It may also be possible to be put in touch with Friends with experience of telling Godly Play style stories.



Photo: Sunniva Taylor

4. A simple ritual

This activity or ritual offers an opportunity to go beyond what we 'think' about what human beings are doing to the Earth.

After time to relax, still and centre, everybody is invited to slowly allow into their mind part of creation – plant, animal, bird, insect, water, earth, rock, stone, air, tree – whatever occurs to them without deliberate thought. Questions are then offered about the life of what has come to mind. Everybody is then asked to wonder if it has a message for us. Time is then spent making a mask that represents the aspect of creation that each person has chosen. Then a council is convened and people are invited to speak from behind their mask and give any messages to us as humans. This was done with 5–11 year olds at Yearly Meeting Gathering 2011. It was moving, powerful and engaging. A detailed plan for this activity can be found at:

www.quaker.org.uk/sustainability



YMG 2011.

Photo: ©Mike Pinches 2011

5. Vision map

Aim

The aim of this exercise is to provide a space and means to vision what your community would be like if we had succeeded in becoming low-carbon and sustainable. You could use it to explore visions for your meeting, local community, Britain Yearly Meeting, or society.

Timing

You'll need at least half an hour to do this. Longer would be better.

Materials

Large pieces of paper.

Coloured pens.

Preparation

Arrange chairs (and tables if you have them) into groups. Groups of four are probably best, but you can change this depending on how many people there are. Give each group a large piece of paper as well as a selection of coloured pens.

Process

In groups explore the following questions. You can take as long as you want and be as creative as you want. Perhaps leave the results pinned up somewhere in your meeting house for people to reflect on.

Explain to people that they are being asked to imagine what the world would look like in 2030 if we had successfully built a flourishing low-carbon, sustainable community. You could identify community as your meeting, local community, the UK, or the world.

- * *Food*: What would we eat? How would it be produced, stored, supplied, cooked, shared?
- * *Transport*: What changes would there be in the places we need to travel to – for work, visiting family and friends, shopping, etc.? How would we get there?
- * *Energy*: What changes would there be in the way we use energy for heating, cooking, lighting, appliances? What would our energy sources be?
- * *Work*: Would there be any changes in our working patterns?
- * *Holidays*: What sort of holidays would people be taking? Where would we be going? How would we get there? What would we do differently once there?
- * *Housing*: How would our houses be different?
- * *Local communities*: What would our local communities look like?
- * *Dealing with waste*: What changes might have occurred in the waste we produce and the way we deal with it?
- * *Education*: Would education be delivered in the same way?
- * *Quakers*: What differences would there be in the way we live our lives as Quakers?

*“You see things;
and you say,
‘Why?’ But I dream
things that never
were; and I say,
‘Why not?’”*

*George Bernard Shaw, 1921,
Back to Methuselah,
Part 1, Act I*

6. Vision meditation

Aim

The aim of this exercise is to give space for imagination and dreaming about the future. Visions are important. A vision gives us something to aim for, inspires people and gives hope.

Timing

It would be good to allow at least 45 minutes for this exercise, including the sharing after the meditation.

Materials

You may want to have some paper and pens available for after the visioning.

Preparation

If you are facilitating the session take time to familiarise yourself with the text on page 73.

When it comes to reading the text do so at a relaxed pace, in a calm voice.

Put the pens and paper somewhere in the room where they will be easy to access.

Process

- * Introduce the exercise using the text under Aim, or in your own words. You may want to draw on the text on pages 29–30.
- * Explain that you are going to read something and that the idea is for people to try to visualise around this. They are being asked to sit in silence and reflect on what the words you read bring up for them. Explain that people will respond in different ways and that this is fine. You can let people know that if they are not comfortable with the relaxation parts of the instructions they are free to ignore them, and that if they fall asleep that's okay too!
- * Begin with a short silence before using the suggested recitation. Then read the following text in the manner explained above.

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Start by making yourself as comfortable and relaxed as you can – just take a moment for that. You might want to put your feet flat on the floor. And if you're comfortable with it, let your eyes close. Become aware of your body ... where it touches the ground and seat ... become aware of your breath. Relax into your body and into your breath ...

Take from the following guidelines those elements which engage you.

I'd like you to think of places you know well in your neighbourhood and in your daily life. Notice the things you like about them, and things that you dislike. Notice the people. Notice what you can see, hear, smell, feel ... [pause 2 mins]

Now, in your imagination, leave your neighbourhood. You'd better do it in a sustainable way, so perhaps it's for a walking or cycling trip around the world. But you are away for a long time: ten, fifteen years ... [pause 1 min]

Now it's 2025 and you're coming back. And as you return to those places you know, you realise that your neighbourhood has changed profoundly. It really does feel like coming home because it has become the place you dreamed of living in; it has become sustainable.

Notice how it's different, how it has changed. Notice the things that are the same, the things that are familiar. How does it look, this new neighbourhood? What do you feel? What can you smell, hear? ... [pause 2 mins]

Ask yourself what sort of qualities of character – like courage, patience, strength, gentleness or any other – you feel you need to live in that world, or to help make the sort of world that you would like to live in. Just try to think of one quality, a characteristic that you feel you need, and when you find one, hold that in your mind and just think about it for a moment or two. .. [pause 1 min]

And now ask yourself – perhaps ask the people in this new world – what happened to bring about this change? How do people relate to each other in this changed world? What do they do with their time? How do they live? ... [pause 2 mins]

In a moment I'll ask you to come back into the room and sit for a few minutes in silence. You may like to record something of what you've just experienced on paper, perhaps in words, perhaps a drawing. When you're ready, open your eyes ...

After the visioning

Suggest to people that they turn to their neighbour for five minutes to discuss what they have experienced.

Also explain that there is pen and paper available if people would rather reflect by themselves in that way.

Then bring everyone together. Explain that you are going to spend 10–15 minutes in worship sharing reflecting on the ideas and images that came up.

See page 77 for guidance on worship sharing.

7. Exploring your path

Aim

The aim of this exercise is to help individuals identify where they are led to take action. It shows that we don't all have to do everything, and that we all have skills to contribute. It will also help to highlight the importance of working together and supporting one another.

Introduction

The huge range of possible actions, and the lack of support in the daily lives of many of us, can lead to indecision, procrastination, denial of the relevance of acting, or even despair. Some of us will see this in the lives of close friends, if not in ourselves. So any support, acknowledgement and celebration of actions we have taken, or the inspiration behind them, is something valuable that your Quaker meeting may be able to play a unique role in.

One of the advantages of looking at our priorities together is that it shows we don't all have to do everything. Some of us may be called to change our own lives and households, while others are called to engage with national or international government or business. Very often, if we start with action in the sphere that feels easiest or most important for us, we are later drawn to action in other spheres.

Timing

The timings below are based on an hour-long exercise; however, it would be possible to do it in less if you reduce the time for each part, particularly the worship sharing at the end.

Materials

Spheres of action diagram (page 75), either drawn onto flipchart paper or photocopied so there are enough for every person in the group.

Preparation

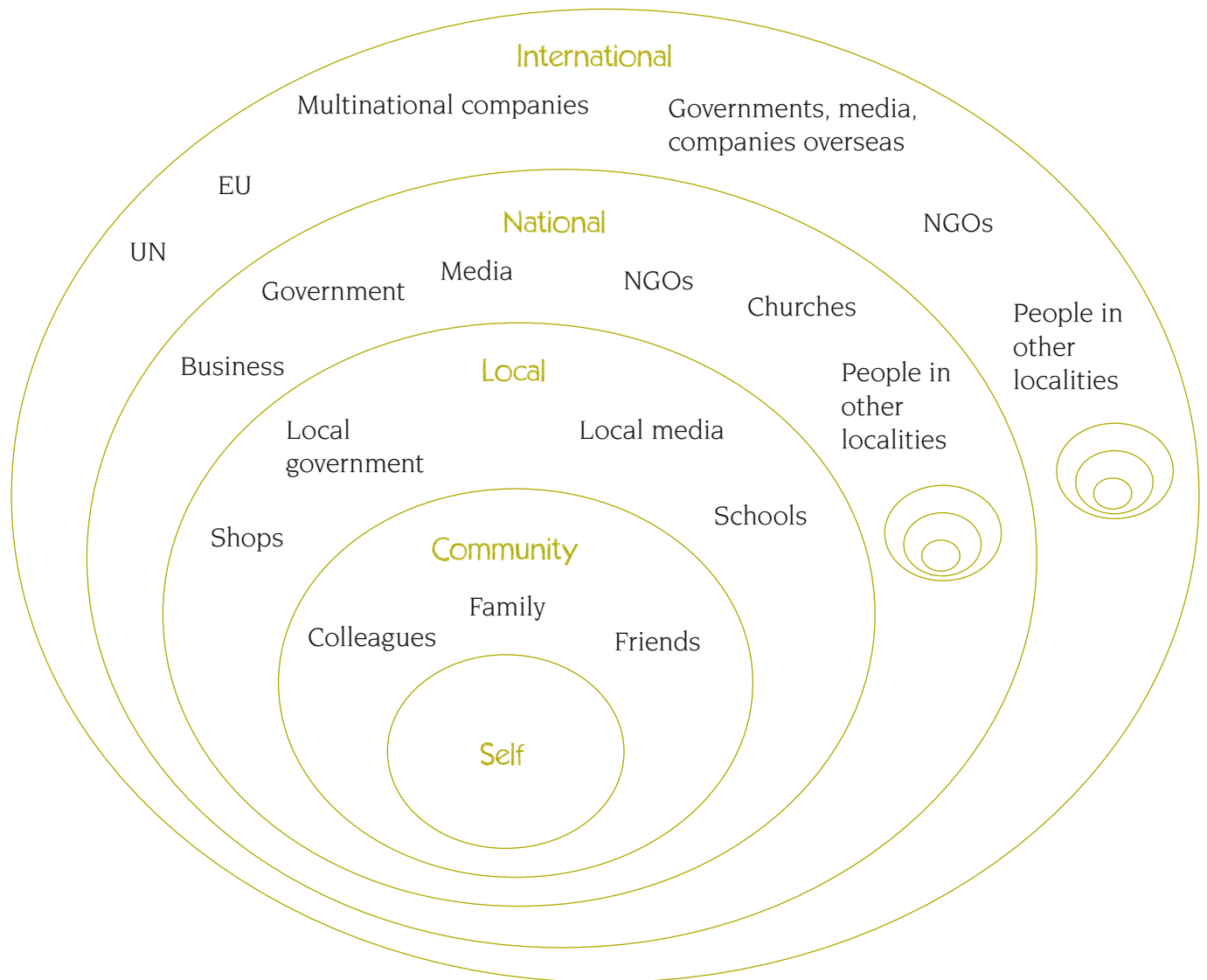
Draw the spheres of action diagram on the flipchart or give a photocopy of the diagram to each Friend.

Have pens available for Friends to write/draw on the diagram if they wish.

Process

- * If you are facilitating the session, introduce the exercise using the information in the introductory section, adapting it as you see fit. (5–10 mins)
- * Then ask Friends to divide into small groups of 2 or 3. Explain that they are being asked to look at the diagram in their groups and discuss where they feel most drawn to or able to act. (15–20 mins)
- * Call for quiet before explaining that there will be ten minutes for personal reflection and that the pens provided are for Friends to record their thoughts on the paper if they would like to. (5–10 mins)
- * Call the group into a circle and explain that you will finish the session with worship sharing (15–20 mins). See page 77 for guidance on worship sharing.

Spheres of action



Guidelines for facilitators

Relax

Your role is to help participants enjoy and benefit from an activity or exercise and learn from each other. Remember you do not have to be an expert on the subject. Your job is to help the workshop go well.

Consider working with a partner

We recommend that two people take responsibility for leading an activity or exercise. This means you can support each other, and one person can be aware of the needs of the group while the other leads. Take turns.

Be prepared

Read and familiarise yourself with the exercise, and how you are going to run it. Check you have the materials you need and that you understand the timings suggested.

Be flexible

The timings are suggestions only; generally larger groups will take longer to do exercises, and smaller groups less time. You may also want to alter timings if something appears to be going really well. You can be creative.

Establish group agreement

For some of the exercises you might want to establish confidentiality – nothing said in the room is repeated outside. See if the group would like to agree to this. Another approach might be to speak only from experience, but allow everyone to contribute, or not as they wish, and value and listen respectfully to everyone's contributions even if you disagree with them. You may want to write up your group agreement somewhere and remind the group of it from time to time.

Be aware

Do not let one person dominate: make it clear that you are encouraging everyone to participate. Make space for those who find it harder to speak in a group. Be aware of those with sight, hearing or mobility impairment and try to do what is necessary to enable them to participate fully. Check with them beforehand what they need and prefer. Encourage participants to write clearly.

Small groups

Working in small groups can create a heightened sense of safety for those who find larger groups difficult, but be aware that some people don't like it. You can use a variety of ways to split up the group depending on what you feel is best: for example, suggesting people turn to someone near them, counting around the room, or finding someone they haven't worked with before.

Worship sharing

Worship is a means by which we open ourselves up to God's power and creativity in the world, and give thanks. It is from this that we find our reasons and means to act. Gather to share in worship around sustainability. Worship sharing allows you to focus your worship on a particular concern; this helps to explore your own experience and share with others more deeply than in normal conversation. You may want to start with a poem or story on the theme to get people thinking, or include this as part of a longer session containing other activities.

Before gathering to share in worship remember the following:

- * Worship sharing is in the spirit of worship, grounded in silence
- * Participants should speak when they are ready
- * Others should focus on listening, upholding the speaker and letting go of any desire to react or respond
- * Leave some silence between contributions so that the group remains centred
- * Participants should not speak more than once, at least not before everyone else has spoken.

See *Quaker faith & practice* 12.21 for further guidance on worship sharing.