



# Building our Children's Meeting for Worship



**How do we do it?**

**Written by Mary Penny**

with Quaker Life Children and Young People's staff team January 2009

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**Children in ‘big meeting’ at the beginning or end?** The model described here draws children into the concluding Worship of whole Meeting before celebrating the togetherness of the meeting community with drinks and biscuits. Where children don’t go into ‘big meeting’, the group will have to devise its own concluding Worship and ending for Children’s Meeting.

‘Building our Children’s Meeting for Worship’ invites you to draw on material found in *Journeys in the Spirit*, the monthly Quaker publication produced by the Quaker Life Children and Young People’s Work Staff Team and free by subscription. *Journeys in the Spirit* comes in two editions:

**A children’s edition** every month offering a variety of themed activities for children’s meeting (ages 4 – 12).

**A youth edition** three times a year (February, June and October) providing enough material for a weekend with young people (ages 12 – 18) and flexible enough to be used over a series of shorter sessions.

**For information about this and other resources:**

Children and Young People’s Work Staff Team, Friends House,  
173–177 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ, Phone: 020 7663 1013  
Email: [cypadmin@quaker.org.uk](mailto:cypadmin@quaker.org.uk) Website: [www.quaker.org.uk/cyp](http://www.quaker.org.uk/cyp)

# Children's Meeting for Worship

No longer Sunday school, children's class or 'taking the children' but: Children's Meeting for Worship.

How do we *do* it?

At one time in my life I found myself 'taking the children' every single week. I was asked if I was resentful and whether I minded?

"No! Not at all" – but it took me a little time to work it out.

Unexpectedly, I found that I was not missing anything, the time with the children had become my own Meeting for Worship. My meeting alongside the children followed the same shape, and it had the same depth of experience as I found in 'big meeting'. I emerged spiritually enlivened and enriched by our time together.

So how do we do it? How can we plan and prepare to travel together with our children in Meeting for Worship?"

What is *our* experience? What do *we* do in Meeting for Worship?

- We come with hearts and minds prepared;
- We are welcomed, and we join a group of 'Friends';
- We settle and make ourselves receptive;
- We listen deep inside ourselves, and we may listen to the ministry of others;
- We ponder these things, what they mean to us and where they lead us;
- We are joined by the children, we reflect on our thoughts;
- We shake hands, smile, greet one another, and enjoy drinks and biscuits together – a whole worshipping community.

We can do this with our children – we can build a Meeting for Worship.

**Throughout** this booklet there are grey boxes. These contain two or three sorts of resources help for you:

- 1. Simple ideas for you to use.**
- 2. Some ideas to get you started.** These may spark ideas and inventions or a conversation or experience with another Friend. Some links to these might be found in the Ideas Store in the Children and Young People's Work pages on the Britain Yearly Meeting website – [www.quaker.org.uk/cyp](http://www.quaker.org.uk/cyp) . You can also use them as a way to search for activity ideas on the internet.
- 3. A way to link the Building Meeting for Worship** headings to Journeys in the Spirit. This then gives you a wonderful range of thinking, resources and activities for children and young people's work.

**Many of the activities in 1 and 2 can be used in different parts of the Building Meeting for Worship model. Time will not always allow an activity at every stage, but carefully chosen words, tone of voice, holding hands, very simple things can help in moving the group on.**

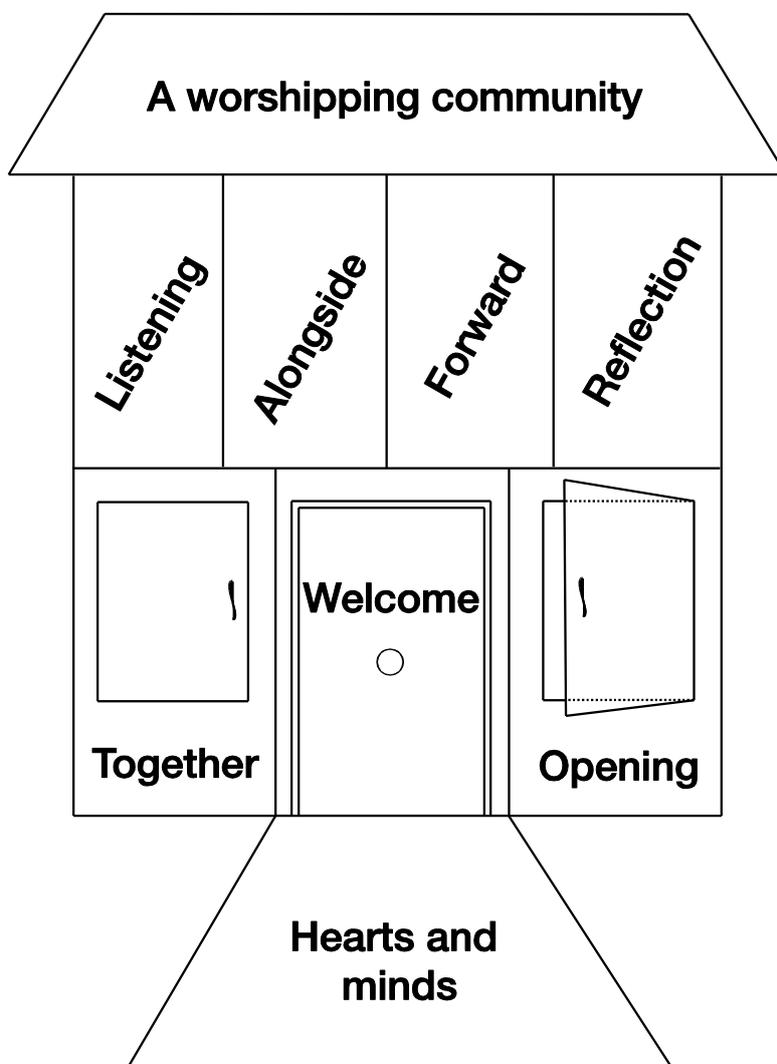
# Making a programme – building a Children’s Meeting for Worship

We can think of what we ‘do’ in Children’s Meeting as ‘building’ a Meeting for Worship.

We go through the ‘stages’ as we would in an adult Meeting but ‘out loud’, explicitly, with others.

Sometimes we might talk about the different stages and how they fit into the pattern linking us to parents and others in ‘big meeting’.

The ‘building’ is a process which is completed in what can seem a very short time. Do not be overwhelmed by the possibilities, or too anxious that not everything has been ‘fitted in’. We travel alongside each other and at our own pace, always making sure there is proper space at the end for Reflection, and a sharing of what has come out of our time together.



**So! Let’s get started –**



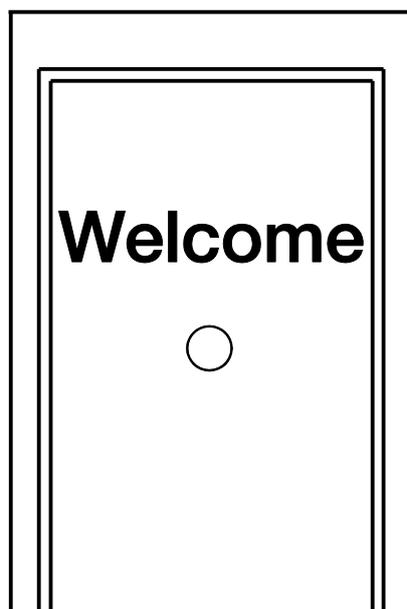
**Your heart and mind must have enough time to be quite sure what you are planning to do.**

And Yes! You do need time! It is the quiet 'woolgathering' in the week before; on the bus, or whilst doing the washing up. It is making notes and being clear. It is the assembling of pictures, stories and activity materials on Saturday evening. It is the chat with the person with whom you are working, and it is getting to Meeting in good time.

**Children** coming to Meeting arrive in different states of preparedness. It may be possible to be in touch with children asking them to bring something with them or to have a special thought in mind. Often attendance is so 'fluid' this is hardly practical. Efforts should be made to encourage parents to look forward to Meeting with their children and to be assured of their welcome.

**Journeys in the Spirit link:**

Look in the **Getting Ready** section of each Journeys in the Spirit for ideas, information and thinking about preparing hearts and minds for children's meeting for worship. See Journeys in the Spirit children's work issue 14, 'What is Meeting for Worship?'



**Being wanted and being welcomed into a comfortable, safe, welcoming space.**

There is a model for **spiritual growth and development** in faith settings that puts 'experience' at its centre. This was written by John Westerhoff. (See Resources on pages 14 - 15.) This fits well with the Quaker way – it emphasises the importance of being wanted and welcomed, of safety and comfort.

**Arrive** in good time to make sure the room is ready: warm, light, and with room to make a circle on the floor. If your knees are not up to it, it is quite OK to use a chair and make it an opportunity to talk about respecting individual needs, and why in our Meeting we have a ramp, a loop, a 'disabled' loo – so we can feel we are all welcome. Put out tables and chairs as appropriate for what you have planned, flowers and *Quaker Faith & Practice*. Flowers? 'Big meeting' has them, why not children? Our Meeting is held in the wisdom of our *Quaker faith & practice*, having the book there connects us to our Quakerism.

**Greet** the children and their parents. Try to be sure you have names, and how to pronounce them, accurately. Jot them down if you might forget.

If your programme includes tasting and eating, check for food allergies and check for other special needs.

If children are new and/or reluctant, invite the parent to stay.

A parent bringing a child for the first time must be assured that a Child Protection Policy is in place and adhered to. Does your Meeting have a simple guidance leaflet for parents and carers? Do you have copies of the Quaker Life children's leaflet to give to children? (See Resources on pages 14 - 15.)

Records should be kept of all children attending. No records, or named photographs, are to be left in the Meeting House.

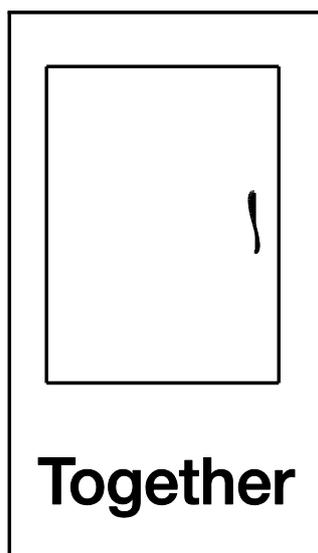
## **Welcome.**

### **Simple ideas:**

- Make a 'Welcome' for the door – individual letters by each child – appoint a co-ordinator.
- Welcoming activities for early arrivals can be put out on tables.
- Make a 'Welcome' poster.
- Think of different ways/customs for saying hello (use these later).
- Make badges for you/for a Quaker/for a friend.
- Small toys to play with and 'take to meeting' arranged in a circle.

### **Journeys in the Spirit link:**

Look in the **Gather** section of each Journeys in the Spirit for ideas and information about welcoming and gathering ready for worship.



## Looking round at each other, being part of a Friendly group.

Almost all children who have been to school, nursery or playgroup will have experience of 'circle time', of gathering in a circle on the floor and being led in 'sharing' by their teacher.

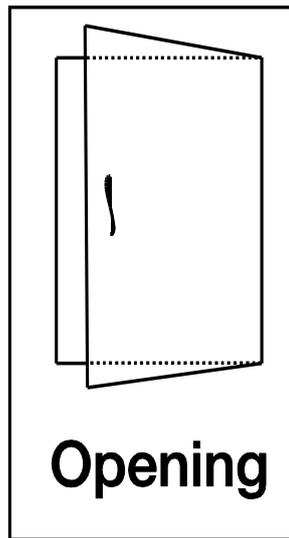
### **Together.**

#### **Simple ideas:**

- **Call** the children together into a circle on the floor and expect quiet – this implies and expects acceptance of the discipline of sitting together in a particular way.
- Names and Games ideas. Go rounds: with names, what I like about my name, how I got it; my favourite colour / pudding / flower – share in pairs. Button games. Webbing with ball or wool. Mexican wave. Shared food. Singing games. Show and tell. Pairs games. Parachute game.
- **'Circle time'**. Listening and sharing as we sit together in a circle is our way of being together for discussion and for reflection. For a large group, or for a new group who do not know each other well, it can be useful to discuss and agree how we can get the most out of our sharing circles/discussion. (See page 13).
- **Welcome** everyone to 'our Meeting for Worship' - ask if anyone is here for the first time.
- Introduce yourself and have a go round of names. Make this into a game.
- Share your name and a special bit of news (sensitive encouragement/curtailment needed here).
- Share your name and choose an adjective (describing word) for yourself which starts with the same sound.
- Shaking hands game in circle: 'I am Mary I am shaking hands with...?' 'Peter' 'Good morning Peter' 'I am Peter I am shaking hands with...?' 'Good morning Sally' etc.

#### **Journeys in the Spirit link:**

Look in the **Gather** section of each Journeys in the Spirit for ways to help a sense of being together grow in a group.



## Being ready to listen, to ‘open’ ourselves.

And all ages can engage with this.

What about a wide age range when, maybe, someone starts to listen and doesn't quite understand? Here it can be useful to have some colouring to do.

Up to this point we have been able to be comfortably ‘all age’ – what if there is a wide range of age and ability? Use the fact that there are two of you – one wiping noses and unobtrusively catching the ‘crawlers’ while the other preserves a still centre. One of you can give more detailed information, and more sharing and discussion can take place with older children, as you move on to making and doing things together - putting yourselves alongside the theme or story and moving forward. Plan this shared responsibility between the two of you.

### Opening.

#### Simple ideas:

- Talk about opening.
- Ask things like ‘Are you comfortable?’; are you ready?’ - ‘ready to listen?’ --‘to listen to...’
- Mary Stone’s book – ‘Don’t Just do something, sit there’ for guidance on talking about stilling and centering.
- Mary Test ‘On sitting still’ story – reproduced in Journeys in the Spirit children’s edition 9.
- Journeys in the Spirit children’s issue12 – ‘Stilling, centering and listening’.

#### Ideas for opening:

Eyes and seeing. Smells and scents. Opening flowers – paper on water, or real flower buds e.g. Iris stylosa. Opening hands. Opening a parcel (with something which leads into theme). Settling sand in a jar of water. Opening a book. Curling down into a ball and opening up. A visualisation. Lighting candles.

#### Journeys in the Spirit link:

Look in the **Engage** section of each Journeys in the Spirit for ways to begin to introduce a theme or topic into children’s meeting.

# Listening

## Listening to story, to each other, to another's experience.

A time to introduce a theme but not yet invite response to it.

### Listening.

#### Simple ideas:

- Mary Stone's book – 'Don't Just do something, sit there'
- Mary Test 'On sitting still' story –Journays in the Spirit children's issue 9.
- Opportunities for little ones? It can help to have prepared simple drawings relevant to what you are talking about – for small ones to colour in.

#### Ideas for listening:

Music. Musical instruments. A rainstick. Shells/toilet rolls (to listen to ourselves – we say it is the sea but really it is the blood rushing through our ears). Whispering. What can you hear? Body sounds. Bird calls. Pin drop. Sign language/other languages.

#### Journays in the Spirit link:

Look in the Engage section of each Journays in the Spirit for activities to encourage listening – to story, to each other, to another's experience. Journays in the Spirit children's issue 12 – 'Stilling, centering and listening'.

Using a theme - the themes in Journays in the Spirit since 2007 have been:

Children's edition:

Series 1. Spiritual development: inwards to ourselves; outwards to others; downwards to the earth; upwards to the mystery, to God.

Series 2. Quaker Testimonies: truth; simplicity; equality; peace; sustainability.

Series 3. Quakers people of God: being and doing: prayer; Quaker United Nations Office; stilling and centering; Quaker business method; Israel / Palestine; Quaker work in South Africa, former Yugoslavia, South Asia; Quakers and stopping bullying; walk cheerfully over the world; UK peace work; non-violence; Advices and Queries; belonging and joining.

Youth edition:

Spiritual development; Quaker testimonies; Quaker youth book project; Slavery then, now and its legacies; sexuality and relationships; creative activities; making Quaker decisions.

**Alongside**

and

**Forward**

**Being alongside what we have heard, felt and experienced and thinking, discerning where it is taking us.**

This is a time for thinking, talking and sharing. We may engage in a creative activity, using our hands and freeing our minds - joining in a discussion or just being still and quiet, all become a 'giving' – a tangible ministry.

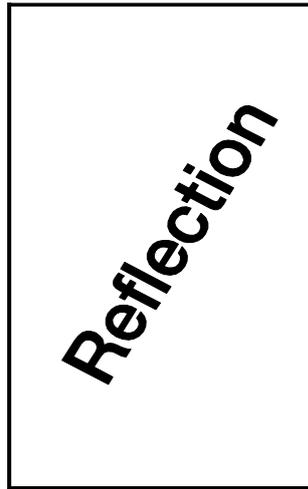
**Alongside and forward.**

**Ideas for getting alongside and moving forward:**

Cooking. Acting, mime, role play. Toys, puppets, bricks, tube people to tell a story. Music, dance. Weaving, sewing. Collage. Mosaic. Drawing - crayons / stickers, felt pens, paints. Making books. Making, filling & decorating boxes. Plasticene / clay / playdough / natural materials. Growing & planting. Writing. Kites. Prayer flags. 'Treasure' hunt. Special day activities.

**Journeys in the Spirit link:**

Draw on the Journeys in the Spirit – **Respond** section. In each issue this contains many activities – games, exercises, making and doing, which help develop aspects of the theme and give opportunity for discussion at appropriate levels. You may devise your own activity to develop a response to your theme.



## **To draw to a close we have a time of reflection.**

**Gather** again in a circle. **Think** back to what we have been doing and identify one thing we are going to take away with us. This might also be the thought we will take with us into the closing Worship. It can be what we would like to share with the adults at the end of Meeting for Worship.

Reflection can be a time to introduce a short period of **silence**, a time when we are thinking deep inside ourselves.

Make sure you have made enough time for reflection. See circle time guidance on Page 13.

### **Reflection.**

#### **Simple ideas:**

- Use it as a quietening down period so the children can slip into the last five minutes of 'big meeting' ready to sit still and with something to think about. It may help to give them something – a leaf, a flower, a shape in which to invest their thoughts and which they can then take into Meeting.
- Putting 'thoughts' into the centre using: Weaving wheel; Hexagon patchwork; Leaves on a tree; Butterflies; Shells/boats/flowers on water; imaginary stones in a pond (or pebbles dropped in real water); opening flowers; flowers in a garden. Taking stars from the sky or a sunray from around the sun, as you share what you are taking away.
- Watching an hourglass or egg timer.
- Imagery – holding a shell or a stone in your hand.

#### **Journeys in the Spirit link:**

Look in the **Reflection** section of each Journey in the Spirit for thoughts, processes, activities and guidance on reflection times.

# A worshipping community

## Together confirming our community

**Joining** 'big meeting' even for a short time is valuable for children, and for the adults supporting them, as it includes them in the whole worshipping community and is a precious introduction to, and confirmation of, silent Quaker Worship.

**Quieten** the group in the period of reflection and prepare them to go into Meeting as quietly as possible. Wait for the nod from the doorkeeper (in case someone is speaking). Help the children locate their parents if they wish to go and sit with them.

**Handshakes** mark the official conclusion of Worship. In some Meetings one of the children joins the Elders and takes part in the concluding handshake. Sometimes everyone shakes hands with everyone else.

**'Afterword'**, news of Friends, and notices may drag on, and the children become understandably restless. The Meeting must decide how to cope with this and all volunteers be made aware of what is expected. In some Meetings children are invited to contribute in 'Afterword' and may then choose to share their thoughts. Getting into the way of doing this helps the children feel included in the Meeting, and reminds the adults of their contribution. Children may be invited to leave (or to stay with their parents) before the notices (or after any appropriate to them have been given) to go and sit 'formally' in the coffee room for squash and biscuits. Children's volunteers may offer to take responsibility for this and include structured chat or games until the adults are released.

**Joining together** for drinks, biscuits and time all together is an important conclusion to Meeting, but parents should be made aware that, once Meeting for Worship is concluded, their children become their responsibility; playing on the benches or rioting in the garden is not the responsibility of the volunteer.

# Resources and other information

## 1. Glossary and practical details

**Area Meetings** may have a Children and Young People's Committee – this may include convenors from the Local Meetings.

**Local Meetings** may have a Children's Convenor who convenes the Children's Committee.

**The Children's Committee** will agree practical arrangements, seek volunteers to take Children's Meeting for Worship, and draw up a rota.

**Elders** are responsible for the spiritual growth and development of all members of the Meeting. It is hoped that they will be supportive and may agree to be members of the Children's Committee.

**Overseers** have oversight of physical and mental wellbeing of the Meeting. Rooms where the children meet will be their concern. If a child gives cause for concern (withdrawn and anxious to non-stop cartwheels, dancing on the ceiling or downright bad behaviour!) an Overseer may be the right person to broach it with the parent.

**Children and young people's work advocate** Appointed by each Area Meeting and part of a national network supported by the Quaker Life Children & Young People's work staff team.

**Area Meeting Policy on Safeguarding children** All volunteers must operate within this agreed policy. It will usually mean having a CRB Enhanced Disclosure.

**Basic Induction** All volunteers should expect to have a thorough tour of the building, and will know all exits and entrances, toilet facilities, fire procedures, and location of First Aid kit.

**Rota** A rota will be prepared with, usually, two adults working with each group of children. One person may agree to take the lead.

There will be very clear instructions as to what to do if 'prevented' on a certain date. Not turning up; it can be distressing if someone, usually a parent, is regularly taken out of meeting to fill the gap. In one meeting a sensitive Elder, alerted to this problem, persuaded all the Elders to be CRB checked and ready to take responsibility in such an emergency.

**Responsibility** ends when children are reunited with their parents at the end of meeting. Free play in the Meeting House and gardens is parents' responsibility.

**Rooms** should be light and warm, in a reasonable state of decoration and with places to put up posters and pictures. Suitable tables and chairs and a carpeted space to gather on the floor.

**Materials** Basic materials – white paper, pencils, felt tips, rulers, scissors (including left-handed), blu tac, school glue and small saucers. On the whole it is better for people to bring their own 'extras' and claim their expenses, otherwise the cupboard becomes full of stuff which no one checks before they buy, and no one gets round to using.

**Circle time guidance.** We take it in turns. We listen to one another. We can hold different views from others and it is OK to express these views. It helps if we say 'I think ... because ...' and give a reason. When we say anything, we expect to be kind, and that others will listen with kindness. We do not put one another down.

## 2. Other resources and publications

### Quaker Life Children and Young People's Work staff team publications:

#### Journeys in the Spirit

There are two editions, one for working with children, published monthly, the other to support work with young people that is published termly. *Journeys in the Spirit* aims to:

- Provide resources for children & young people's work.
- Help volunteers with their children & young people's work and their own spiritual journeys.
- Encourage children and young people's faith practice, spiritual development and social abilities.
- Develop children and young people's understanding of Quakerism past, present and future.
- Develop community in Quaker meetings and their localities.
- Provide opportunities for exploring, creating and learning in an atmosphere of worship in partnership on our shared journey in the spirit.

The children's edition offers a variety of activities on a theme suitable for Children's Meeting (ages 4–12). This comes out monthly (on the first of each month). The youth edition provides enough material for a weekend with young people (ages 12–18) and is flexible enough to be used over a series of shorter sessions. A guide for the use of *Journeys in the Spirit* is also available from the links below. Samples, back copies and the user's guide can be downloaded from [www.quaker.org.uk/cyp](http://www.quaker.org.uk/cyp) - follow the link to Resources. Subscription form is on the next page of this booklet and also available from the Children and Young Peoples Work staff team – contact details on the back page.

#### Spiritual Development.

This booklet explores our understanding of spiritual development and how this affects our work with young people. It offers a model of spiritual development and practical ideas of ways to work with young people that will help facilitate their spiritual journeys.

#### What About the Children in our Meeting?

This is a work pack that aims to help a Meeting review and reconsider the purposes of its work with children. Short, simply written and practical to use, you can download this leaflet from [www.quaker.org.uk/cyp](http://www.quaker.org.uk/cyp) - follow the link to Resources. Copies are also available from the Children and Young People's Work staff team, using the contact details given on the back page. The main document is accompanied by 2 worksheets; use these together for the complete package.

**Quaker Life Children's Leaflet.** A child friendly guide to Meeting for Worship available from the Children and Young People's Work Staff team – contact details on the next page.

#### Meeting Safety and Safeguarding.

In March 2008 a new edition of *Meeting Safety* was published - this is available online to download at [www.quaker.org.uk/cyp](http://www.quaker.org.uk/cyp) - follow links to Meeting Safety. This replaces any previous editions that you may have and it contains some substantial changes to ways of ensuring safe practice. *Meeting Safety* provides a context for the safeguarding responsibilities that BYM has both at its meetings and at events and activities. It is an important component in any discussion Meetings have to review provision for their children, young people and volunteers.

**Living as a Quaker.** A six session programme for facilitators supporting young people exploring Quaker identity, beliefs, values and interactions with others. Accessible to view on [www.quaker.org.uk/cyp](http://www.quaker.org.uk/cyp) in the publications section of the Resources page. For those working directly with 12-18 year olds, you can contact the CYP staff team for a hard copy.

**Quaker youth work handbook.** An essential resource for those working with young people, setting out policies and procedures, purposes and approaches, ideas and resources. New edition available from September 2009

**Other publications include:**

**Caring for the Whole Child by John Bradford.** A holistic approach to spirituality John Bradford. - London : The Children's Society, 1995.

**'Will our Children Have Faith' J H Westerhoff III** Seabury Press, New York 1976 – includes details the model of spiritual development referred to on page 6.

# Journeys in the Spirit

## Subscribing – it's free. Here's how you do it.

*Journeys in the Spirit* is published by Children and Young People's Staff Team of Quaker Life and is available free by subscription either by email or on paper. A newsletter of events, information and resources is also sent with each issue.

- To subscribe: Post to CYP Administrator, Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ. Use the tear off slip if you wish or phone 020 7663 1013 or email [cypadmin@quaker.org.uk](mailto:cypadmin@quaker.org.uk) and tell us your name, address, phone number, email and local and area meeting
- Please specify whether you would like the Children's or youth edition or both and whether you want to receive an email or need a paper version

## Your details:

Return to: CYP Administrator, Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ.

Your name \_\_\_\_\_

Your address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Phone number \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ Local & Area Meeting \_\_\_\_\_

Do you require a paper copy? YES / NO (please indicate)

**Contact Children and Young People's Work Staff Team** for information about resources, training provided by the Quaker Life network children and young people's training team and other children and young people related queries at:

Friends House, 173–177 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ

Phone: 020 7663 1013

Email: [cypadmin@quaker.org.uk](mailto:cypadmin@quaker.org.uk) Website: [www.quaker.org.uk/cyp](http://www.quaker.org.uk/cyp)