

# Supporting and Nurturing the Quaker Parent

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*by Harriet Heath, Radnor (PA) Monthly Meeting*

The Quaker Parenting Project, a work group of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, has given birth to a range of programs that address the interests and needs of parents and add another focus for adult religious education. Programs of workshops, resources and discussion series now include *Parenting Creatively in a Quakerly Manner*; *Quaker Beliefs, Values, and Practices as Guides to Our Parenting*; *Raising Quaker Children in a non-Quaker World* and *Integrating Quaker Values into Family Life*. These programs and resources evolved because parents were asking for guidance and for opportunities to discuss within a Quaker context their lives with their children.

The programs take different forms as they are adapted to meet the interests and needs of meetings and Friends schools. The workshops, one to two hours in length, explore a specific issue such as how to live following one of the testimonies or how to deal with issues such as integrating Quaker values into family life and raising Quaker children in a non-Quaker world. *Parenting Creatively in a Quakerly Manner* and *Quaker Beliefs, Values, and Practices as Guides to Our Parenting* are discussion series during which parents explore the supports and guides Quakerism offers parents. *Parenting Creatively in a Quakerly Manner* further integrates into the discussion issues such as the developmental readiness and temperament patterns of the children.

Parents participating in these programs are learning about Quakerism. The programs may be a first introduction to Quakerism for attenders and parents whose children are attending a Friends school but who have had no previous contact with Quakerism. The programs are also suitable for longtime Friends seeking guidance on Quaker parenting. During the sessions all participants define what the various Friends testimonies mean to them.

Furthermore, the discussions consider how the various testimonies can be integrated into family life setting the expectation of “walking the talk.” What better way to follow through on our beliefs than to integrate them into our actual family living and have an opportunity to discuss what happens?

Two threads of experiences have led to the offerings of the Quaker Parenting Project. One thread is the accumulation of the experiences of some project group members in leading parenting workshops and discussion series over many years for Quakers in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and Friends General Conference. The second thread is the outcome of a group sharing over a three year period regarding how their Quaker faith supported their parenting.

Leading parent workshops and discussion series confirmed for us that there was indeed a need. Parents, whether new to Quakerism or lifelong Friends, or any experience in between, were looking to their Quaker faith for guidance.

One wrote:

*Two years ago when I was pregnant with my youngest child, I was looking for information on how parenting and Quakerism are connected. I am a birthright Quaker and a committed parent, but I felt uncertain about where the common ground for the two was.*

Recognizing this need and with encouragement and financial support from Friends Institute, a group of parents gathered to share their concerns and experiences. We found we had very many unanswered questions related to our Quaker faith and parenting. For example, if there was that of God in all of us where was it in my two-year-old having a temper tantrum in the supermarket or my adolescent defying with no hesitation the set curfew, declaring “I will not be home and you can’t make me”?

And yet each of us felt our Quaker faith was meaningful to our lives as parents. Another parent wrote:

***A couple of weeks ago we had a tough time with my teenagers. I read the piece on maintaining our center while parenting, and I realized I had lost my center. What do we do when we lose our center?***

As we shared we came to realize there were four components of Quakerism that spoke to our parenting: Quaker beliefs, the testimonies, Quaker practices and the challenge of living in community. We explored these four areas by identifying Quaker beliefs that undergirded our work with our children, exploring the meaning of the Friends testimonies that gave us direction as we guided our children, and discovering the practices that made possible our attempts to live according to those testimonies. The challenge of living in community, we realized, was made more successful by our beliefs, the testimonies and using the practices. In the communities of our families and meetings we needed to “walk the talk.” What we found was summed up by one of our members when she wrote:

***I think all this work we are involved in doing for the Quaker Parenting Project is about taking what we’ve learned from child psychology, from social humanism, from daily practice, and surrounding it all with spiritual silence, awaiting an opening. It is not easy to claim parenting as a spiritual journey, and standing tall and firm is an exceptional way to parent ;but in this writing we are exploring the thing that parents of faith attempt, and that parents of Quaker faith attempt in our particular way—Parenting in the Light.***

The result of our sharing is a spiritual guide, *Paths to Quaker Parenting Using Quaker Beliefs, Testimonies, and Practices*, that we offer other parents in their search to integrate their Quaker faith into their family life, their guidance of their children and their own

This document was downloaded from the website of Friends General Conference. Explore the many resources and opportunities we offer for Quakers, Quaker meetings, and all interested individuals. Go to [www.fgcquaker.org](http://www.fgcquaker.org).



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