



Suggestions to help find stillness and silence in Quaker Meeting for Worship

Quaker Disability Equality Group has heard from a number of people recently who, as a result of disabling conditions, find it difficult to cope with the silence of an hour long Quaker Meeting, and yet they are either longstanding Friends, or are attracted to our testimonies and ways of seeking to live our beliefs. It can be difficult for all of us at times to find that place of calm and stillness, so these suggestions are not exclusively for disabled people.

We hope that this summary of ideas that people have suggested through their own lived experience, may prove helpful both to individual Friends, and to Meetings who may find it difficult to be as inclusive as they might wish. Further suggestions are welcomed, these are suggestions to be expanded and developed through lived experience.

We recognise that being a Quaker is not just about attending Meeting for Worship. It is also about how we live our lives, seeking to live according to our testimonies. Our service, ministry and worship may take many shapes and forms, attending Meeting is not the only one.

We recognise that everyone is an individual and that what suits one person may not suit another. It may take several attempts to find a solution that works for both an individual and the Meeting as a whole. We encourage Friends to “live adventurously”, be inventive and experiment.

- (i) Raise concerns in advance so that solutions may be discerned by the whole Meeting whenever possible, or with the Pastoral Care team for more confidential matters, at the earliest possible opportunity.
- (ii) You may want to meet as a group to offer suggestions, discuss what might work, but the person experiencing difficulties must be supported to express their views and not “encouraged” to agree to something that suits the Meeting rather than meeting their needs. If something helps us into worship, then it is OK, even if not in accordance with long-standing traditions.
- (iii) Short Meetings: some Meetings hold half hour mid-week Meetings, which may prove easier for some.
- (iv) Programmed Meetings, when there is much more, pre-prepared Ministry, which may include music, storytelling or other activities, and relatively little silence.

- (v) Attending “main” Meeting for as long as feels comfortable, and then perhaps a designated person from the Pastoral Care team (and others if willing) could join in on-going Worship sharing, or similar, in a separate room.
- (vi) A small light (battery powered tea light perhaps) could be held and switched on when difficulty encountered to alert a designated person to provide support, accompany out of Meeting or whatever has been agreed in advance.
- (vii) An individual could choose to listen to music (or whatever they find appropriate) through an earphone during Meeting. It would need to be sufficiently quiet so as not to disturb others, and we suggest listening through one earphone only so that spoken Ministry may also be heard.
- (viii) We have heard that some younger Friends have found this to be a common experience. They have suggested activities such as reading, crocheting (or similar), or using prayer beads. An alternative might be to have a “twiddle muff”.
- (ix) A very successful “Meeting for dance” was held at Britain Yearly Meeting, other alternatives might be Meeting for sound/singing/poetry, Meeting for taste/eating. Other ideas may occur.
- (x) Use visual imaging: create a mental image of a turning wheel, place yourself at the centre, see the activity around the rim where there is constant forward movement, track back down along a spoke, find yourself in the still place at the centre, try and stay there, but allow yourself to slide out along the spokes again if need be, feel the road under the tyre as the wheel turns, the breeze across the non-contact spots, now slide back down a spoke to the still centre again, enjoy the stillness and calm. Repeat as needed. Alternatively, imagine a jam jar full of muddy water, shake it up so it is well mixed, then mentally place it on a firm flat surface in front of you. Now watch as the particles settle, the biggest drop out first, then the finer particles, the water slowly clears, maybe a few bits of organic matter float on the surface, but it all becomes still and clear and calm over time.
- (xi) Joining the Woodbrooke online half hour Meetings, where one can join with Friends around the world from the comfort and safety of one’s own environment may work for some, particularly if a local Friend was willing to join and share with you.

We ask Meetings to be tolerant and understanding, to demonstrate their willingness to be inclusive, perhaps with a printed sign stating the understanding that silence can be difficult, and indicating that if someone needs support they should speak to

We remind Friends of Advices and Queries:

18. How can we make the meeting a community in which each person is accepted and nurtured, and strangers are welcome? Seek to know one another in the things

that are eternal, bear the burden of each other's failings and pray for one another. As we enter with tender sympathy into the joys and sorrows of each other's lives, ready to give help and to receive it, our meeting can be a channel for God's love and forgiveness.

22. Respect the wide diversity among us in our lives and relationships. Refrain from making prejudiced judgements about the life journeys of others. Do you foster the spirit of mutual understanding and forgiveness which our discipleship asks of us? Remember that each of us is unique, precious, a child of God.