

Starting A First Day School: Teach!

Beth Collea

CE Coordinator, NEYM

A Family Arrives--Joyfully Embracing Day One!

Smile! You have a treasure to share!

Meet and Greet and make name tags at the Meeting door

- Have the Greeter locate the FDS teacher. (Be clear ahead of time who is responsible for FDS on any given Sunday should children arrive. Haphazard muddling doesn't look safe and welcoming. A new family might feel they are an imposition.)
- Visit First Day School Rooms with parents—give parents an RE program statement and a child safety brochure, if you have them. (Help them quickly decide if Quaker Meeting is for them.) Invite the parents to attend FDS if they wish.
- Explain that children are in Meeting for Worship for 15 minutes and then go to FDS (or whatever your practice is).
- Explain what the pick-up procedure is. Perhaps parents will come to get the children or perhaps the FDS class will go in at the rise of Meeting to show what they did. (You might want to teach the adults a Body Prayer or song together.) (I would recommend the second option for a brand new class.)
- Ask about **allergies** to food. If children have allergies, parents will be very careful and often bring the appropriate snack for the kids or the whole class. They will be relieved and impressed that you asked. You've just made it up and over one hurdle!
- Offer clean, quiet toys if the children are of nursery age and will be in Meeting for Worship.
- Assure parents that Friends are mellow about children's voices. (They may well be anxious if their children are not used to sitting still.) [You can fill out registration forms on a subsequent week.]

First Day School Class

Opening (Every gathering, no matter how small, has an opening.)

- Introduce yourself, ask them a little about themselves—how they are today, if they've ever been to a Quaker Meeting, and some kind of "ice-breaker." For example, have each person offer one word to describe him or herself. Naming favorite flavors of ice cream is another great ice breaker.
- Observe! How do the children get along? Do you need to adjust the seating to gently decrease the poking and teasing? Does anyone have a learning issue? Can you tell how the morning went before they arrived?

Centering Activity—Mandala coloring, Tibetan Prayer bowl, body prayer, etc.

Lesson, Snack, Activity (If the children didn't eat enough breakfast, you can serve snack during the opening.)

- Try to leave some part of the children's work in the room to "welcome" them back if they return. Hang up one of their drawings or even a color copy of the cover of the book you read together. Set the stage for welcoming them back and reviewing what you did this week.
- Try to send something home with them—something the children created or a Parents' Page describing a body prayer, etc. that they can do at home.
- Warmly say "Good bye" and tell them you hope they come another Sunday.

Closing and Clean-Up--Write-up Reflections and Notes from the morning on a Lesson Record form. See The Tool Box in the Religious Education Resources section of the Yearly Meeting website, <http://www.neym.org/REResources/ToolBox/index.html>.

After First Day School

- **Be sure that parents sign your guest book.**
- Have someone “shepherd” them at coffee hour. Don’t smother them, but certainly don’t leave them adrift in your social room. Many, many Friends tell me they feel awkward about coffee hour. See if anyone lives near them or can offer suggestions about whatever they are interested in—summer camps, pediatricians, piano teachers, public schools, etc.
- Offer them a recent Meeting newsletter or other literature about your Meeting or about Quakerism in general.
- Invite them to any upcoming event.
- Don’t forget to mention the wonderful programs for children through NEYM. Friends Camp and the Youth Retreats are truly treasures! Remember, when anyone walks through the door of even a very small Meeting house, he or she enters the Yearly Meeting Quaker Neighborhood filled with opportunities for Friendship and growth.

Follow-up

- Send a hand-written note of welcome on Monday, or as early as possible, with some personal expression of how much your Meeting has meant to you.
 - Include an invitation to a special event in the near future.
 - Include any information that they asked for that would be helpful for them—a contact, a piece of important local information, etc.
- Hold them in the light in your prayer time.
- Debrief with the other members of your Advancement and Outreach/RE team. How did you each think “Day #1” went? Did anything arise that you feel you could do better, more smoothly, more joyfully, or more effectively next time?
- Begin to organize a possible First Day School lesson for next week. Now you know something about what they love to do, what speaks to them, and what might be a next good step on their Quaker Journey.
- Don’t be discouraged if they don’t return the next week. Stay ready, learn any lessons from the week they did visit, and keep praying. They may yet return or another family may find their way to your Meeting!