

**Quotations Concerning:**

## **Quaker Parenting in Hostile Times**

**Compiled by Mary Klein**

The adults in a meeting have a shared responsibility for making a reality of our claim that the presence of children and young people is valued and that everybody's needs and feelings matter. People vary in how comfortable they feel with silent worship; some children, like some adults, take naturally to its disciplines and joys; others have to work at it. Some meetings offer other forms of worship from time to time. In any case it is important that the needs of all age groups are considered when we plan our activities.

– *Britain Yearly Meeting (2013)*

For a Quaker, religion is not an external activity, concerning a special 'holy' part of the self. It is an openness to the world in the here and now with the whole of the self. If this is not simply a pious commonplace, it must take into account the whole of our humanity: our attitudes to other human beings in our most intimate as well as social and political relationships. It must also take account of our life in the world around us, the way we live, the way we treat animals and the environment. In short, to put it in traditional language, there is no part of ourselves and of our relationships where God is not present.

– *Harvey Gillman (1988)*

The duty of the Society of Friends is to be the voice of the oppressed but [also] to be conscious that we ourselves are part of that oppression. Uncomfortably we stand with one foot in the kingdom of this world and with the other in the Eternal Kingdom. Seldom can we keep the inward and outward working of love in balance, let alone the consciousness of living both in time and in eternity, in timelessness. Let us not be beguiled into thinking that political action is all that is asked of us, nor that our personal relationship with God excuses us from actively confronting the evil in this world. The political and social struggles must be waged, but a person is more and needs more than politics, else we are in danger of gaining the whole world but losing our souls.

– *Eva I. Pinthus (1987)*

We help [our children] not by futile attempts to "keep them in the Society" (they must make their own explorations), but by recognizing their own full stature as God's children. If we, the important adults in their lives, respect their integrity, their capacity to worship and experience God, then they will respect it too. If we share the skills that we are learning, then they will practice them too. If we are truly touched by God in worship, and realize that we can all, both young and old, open up to God, then we have made a good foundation. A lot else will follow, in the children's religious education, but God comes first.

– *Anne Hosking (1984)*

Excerpts compiled by *Western Friend Online* (2017)

I think parents need to be aware of how vital it is to leave everything to answer a young child's reaching out to you to 'come quickly' to share a sunset or the beauty of a discovered wild flower, or the trick of the pet dog, or to listen with full attention, no matter what seems prior on your agenda, when children burst into the house from school eager to have you listen to a tale of woe or a triumph they have experienced during the day. There is little question that if as a parent we have not taken the time really to listen to children when they are young, listened not only to their words but to their feelings behind the words, they are unlikely to want to come with their sharings in later life. Learning to listen to each other in families can help to make us better listeners to others and to the Inner Guide.

– *Dorothy Steere (1984)*

Our children are given to us for a time to cherish, to protect, to nurture, and then to salute as they go their separate ways. They too have the light of God within, and a family should be a learning community in which children not only learn skills and values from parents, but in which adults learn new ways of experiencing things and seeing things through young eyes. From their birth on, let us cultivate the habit of dialogue and receptive listening. We should respect their right to grow into their own wholeness, not just the wholeness we may wish for them. If we lead fulfilling lives ourselves, we can avoid overprotecting them or trying to live through them... The family is a place to practise being 'valiant for the truth'. We can live lives of integrity, letting both 'yes' and 'no' come out of the depth of truth within us, careful of the truth in all our dealings, so that our words and our lives speak the same message. We cannot expect our children to be honest with us or anyone else if they hear us stretching the truth for convenience or personal gain. They are quick to catch such discrepancies. Moreover, we should trust them enough to be honest with them about family problems – disasters, serious illness, impending death. It is far harder on children not to know what is wrong.

– *Elizabeth Watson (1980)*

The pre-adolescent stage is such a delightful time! . . . At this stage, the young are in possession of their intellectual faculties, they have a great curiosity, and yet they are still naïve enough to welcome adult guidance. This is the time when you can have fun together with a minimum of discord. It does not last. The closeness and intimacy of the family group must give way to wider relationships and to a reassessment of inherited values. The search for personal identity usually means tough going for both generations.

– *Josephine Duveneck (1978)*

In the busy years of home life the parents are upheld and strengthened by their dependence upon God and upon one another; the efficient running of the home, the simple hospitality, the happy atmosphere, are all outward signs of this three-fold inner relationship. Home-making is a Quaker service in its own right. It should be recognized as such and a proper balance preserved, so that other activities – even the claims of Quaker service in other fields – should not be allowed to hinder its growth.

– *Britain Yearly Meeting (1959)*

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We cannot hope to transfer more than a little of our wisdom to our young people – if wisdom it is. We have increasingly to stand back as they grow older, knowing that the problem is passing out of our hands. They go off to college – or to live in a flat of their own, that aim and delight of so many young people. At last they have privacy, freedom from supervision and criticism, independence – but they are now fully exposed to all that we fear. Often they have much more self-confidence than is justified (“I can take care of myself.”), and they little know that to avoid disaster they must avoid the circumstances in which the first sequence of events takes place. . .

This is the moment of disengagement, when parents must tell themselves that the young people are no longer their children and that they are outside their discipline. The decisions made by the young men and women mustn’t be clouded by confusion with parental emotions (“How can you bear to hurt your mother?”). Parents cannot help being anxious, but they must bear that in themselves, not project it. They cannot live their children’s lives for them.

It is also the moment for parents to tell themselves that their children are not alone. They are in the hands of God. God does not offer any kind of perfection in the actual circumstances of life, nor freedom from exposure to evil.

– *Kenneth C Barnes (1960)*

We recognize the new freedom and equality of those marriages in which both parents are able to pursue careers and to share the duties of the home. We are proud to think that in the past, by liberating women in the ministry and encouraging them in service, we have helped to create this pattern. But we know, too, that it brings its own tensions and dangers. If parents pursue their own interests and vocations (however worthy) without consideration for their families, the children will suffer. There are times when family calls must be put before all others, even those of our Society. We do not believe that rules of conduct can be strictly laid down, but we beg parents to be ready, in this as in other ways, to sacrifice monetary advantage, the pleasure of liberty, or the interests of their professional life, in order to preserve and build the family.

– *Britain Yearly Meeting (1959)*

I ask for daily bread, but not for wealth, lest I forget the poor.  
I ask for strength, but not for power, lest I despise the meek.  
I ask for wisdom, but not for learning, lest I scorn the simple.  
I ask for a clean name, but not for fame, lest I condemn the lowly.  
I ask for peace of mind, but not for idle hours, lest I fail to hearken to the call of duty.

– *Inazo Nitobe (1909)*

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My Dear Children: . . . I will begin with that which is the beginning of all true wisdom and happiness - the holy fear of God. . . . I would a little explain this principle to you: It is called Light . . . because it gives man a sight of his sin; . . . This is that which distinguishes Friends from all other societies, as they are found walking in the same, which leads out of vain honors, compliments, lusts, and pleasures of the world. O, my dear children! this is the pearl of price; part with all for it, but never part with it for all the world. . . . Receive it into your hearts, give it room there, let it take deep root in you, and you will be fruitful unto God in every good word and work. As you take heed to it, and the holy enlightenings and motions of it, you will have a perfect discerning of the spirit of this world in all its appearances in yourselves and others; the motions, temptations, and workings of it, as to pride, vanity, covetousness, revenge, uncleanness, hypocrisy, and every evil way; you will see the world in all its shapes and features, and you will be able to judge the world by it, and the spirit of the world in all its appearance; you will see, as I have done, that there is much to deny, much to suffer, and much to do; and you will see that there is no power or virtue but in the light, spirit, grace, an truth of Christ, to carry you through the world to God's glory and your everlasting peace.

– *William Penn (1881)*

To watch the spirit of children, to nurture them in Gospel Love, and labour to help them against that which would mar the beauty of their minds, is a debt we owe them; and a faithful performance of our duty not only tends to their lasting benefit and our own peace, but also to render their company agreeable to us. A care hath lived on my mind, that more time might be employed by parents at home, and by tutors at school, in weightily attending to the spirit and inclinations of children, and that we may so lead, instruct and govern them, in this tender part of life, that nothing may be omitted in our power, to help them on their way to become the children of our Father who is in heaven.

– *John Woolman (1758)*

The Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.

– *Numbers 14:18*

Parents are not to be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their parents; each will die for their own sin.

– *Deuteronomy 24:16*

[Lord, you] restored me to health and let me live. . . Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish. In your love you kept me from the pit of destruction; you have put all my sins behind your back. For the grave cannot praise you, death cannot sing your praise; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness. The living, the living – they praise you, as I am doing today; parents tell their children about your faithfulness.

– *Isaiah 38:16-19*