



Quaker Life Network
Mental Health in Meetings Cluster
Opening the door to talking about mental health

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2.5 hours including break

The purpose of this workshop is to provide an opportunity for meetings to discuss mental health and well-being issues in a safe and supportive environment.



Activity	Person Leading	Resources	Timings
1. Silence Opening Worship			5 minutes
2. Introduction Names around circle – just names and local meeting. How do I feel in one word? Introduce facilitators briefly with personal interest/background – (max 2 mins each = 5) Explain the <i>objective</i> of the workshop: “to provide an opportunity for this meeting to discuss mental health and well-being in a safe and supportive environment. To be clear, this is not a therapeutic session.” Explain the <i>importance</i> of taking care of self (mention elders present) if intense emotions come up. Rules for Group Agreement – “Before we proceed Friends, can we agree that what is discussed in this workshop will stay in the workshop. You may wish to share the wisdom of things that you have heard but please make sure not to mention people’s names or make them identifiable. Also that what we share today will be received with kindness and respect” (Hoping for a response of “I hope so”).		Flipchart page with the words: There is that of God in everyone in very big letters	10 minutes
3. Language “Words are often powerful. You may hear some of these words today. Read LIST. Please try not to make value judgements about words people use during the workshop – they’re descriptions used by different people at various times, <u>and</u> <u>often mean different things to different people.</u> ”		LIST of Words	5 minutes

Activity	Person Leading	Resources	Timings
<p>A&Q17 – show poster</p> <p><i>When words are strange or disturbing to you, try to see where they have come from and what has nourished the lives of others. Listen patiently and seek the truth which other people's opinions may contain for you.' I hope we can listen in the spirit.</i></p> <p>If there is time and interest from the specific Meeting, use this as an interactive exercise to explore the stigma around mental health in the context of the language we use: ask participants to call out positive and then negative words related to mental health.</p>		Stick poster up at the front	
<p>4. Encounters with Mental Distress Booklet</p> <p>Get into small groups – 4 or 5 people – can count people off or ask them to self-select.</p> <p>Ask each group to select one of the poster stories and discuss the story. Think of the different perspectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The person living with the mental health condition • The carers / family supporting the person with the mental health condition • The meeting who are trying to support that person 	<p>Time-keeping AND listening to groups</p>	<p>Print Outs from Encounters book</p> <p>(Put up around the wall and let people read them, then choose one to work on – either discuss or role play)</p>	30 minutes
<p>5. In same groups,</p> <p>A. Individually reflect on what you've been discussing and how/whether it relates to any of your own experiences?</p> <p>B. As a group discuss the issues that came up and think of possible positive responses – agree one to report to the meeting.</p>	<p>Time-keeping AND listening to groups</p>	<p>Paper and pens</p>	<p>3 minutes</p> <p>7 minutes</p>
<p>6. Break for tea/coffee</p> <p>Each group brings one positive suggestion to the plenary.</p>		<p><i>Suggest participants look at resources</i></p>	Say 15, but actually 20 minutes
<p>7. Plenary</p> <p>Exploring the positive suggestions that groups have brought.</p>		Flip chart	15 mins

Activity	Person Leading	Resources	Timings
8. Snakes and Ladders or Boundaries games Individually, write out scenarios on the snakes and the ladders and then play the game discussing them as they arise.			30 mins
9. Facilitators' feedback To reflect on what we have heard and what the meeting struggles with, as well as some helpful approaches.			10 mins
10. Conclusion and Reflection In a worship-sharing format: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you think this workshop has provided an opportunity for you and the meeting to discuss a subject that might not otherwise be raised / shared? Have you learned something new today – what will you take from this workshop? (If you have any suggestions or comments to improve this workshop, please fill in an evaluation form. Alternative questions to ask at this stage: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What was your experience of the workshop? What was helpful for you? What was less helpful? What are the next steps for your Meeting? 		Read out and allow time for each person to answer the final question if they so wish.	10 minutes
11. Ending Silence and Resource Pack Finish with worshipful silence. Remind participants of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resource Pack and Mind Booklets Quaker Life Mental Health Cluster Postcards Mental health in Meetings leaflets Encounters book and accompaniment leaflet Please fill in Evaluation Forms 		Resources pack and Evaluation Forms	END

Evaluation form

Opening the door to talking about mental health



Date:

Venue:

Do you think this workshop achieved its objective of providing an opportunity for Meetings to discuss a subject that would not otherwise be raised or shared?

Given our objectives, is there anything else you would have liked us to include? Or is there anything you think we should omit?

Any comments about the facilitation?

Your Name (optional):

Resources

Boundaries Game – mental health version



The following statements are to be used with the boundaries game instructions, available at, www.quaker.org.uk/documents/boundaries-introduction-and-how-to-play (the instructions and guidance could be included in this version or appear as a link).

This version is to be used in Quaker meetings as an aid to exploring mental illness or boundaries that help everyone to be included in meeting life.

Instructions

- 1) Each group needs a set of paper cards and a large piece of paper with a central area marked 'acceptable' and an outer area marked 'unacceptable'. Alternatively, place the card marked 'acceptable' inside a large loop of cord, and a card marked 'unacceptable' outside this boundary.
- 2) The group sits around their large piece of paper and divides the cards evenly (without reading them) between all the group members.
- 3) Working independently and in silence, members of the group read the statements on their own cards and place them, face up, on the large piece of paper to indicate the statement as 'acceptable' or 'unacceptable' in meeting. NOTE: Blank cards are included in this pack, so that participants may add their own issues at any stage of the game.
- 4) When all the statements have been placed, all members of the group look at them without comment, and still in silence, turn over any statements which they would have placed differently.
- 5) As a group they now discuss those statements which have been turned over (the cards on which all are agreed can be tidied away). Agreement may or may not be reached as to where each should be placed!
- 6) Consider how the experience you have just shared could support eldership and oversight in your meeting. Are the boundaries to be maintained clearer? Are you all aware of difficult areas and areas where opinions differ? What might change in your meeting?

Boundaries game cards – shortened version

Openly repeated complaints about the Meeting	Repeated demands of the meeting
Suggesting that a carer needs respite	Encouraging a carer to seek respite
Ministry centred on personal problems	Ministering about a Friend's distress
Sharing personal information about the illness with others in Meeting	Asking to hold someone in the Light and giving personal details during Meeting for Worship.
Giving money/ financial support [to a distressed Friend] – as a one off or regularly	Lending money
Inviting a [distressed] Friend to come and stay in your home [Inviting someone to stay overnight]	Taking the friend in as a lodger
Holding a Meeting for Clearness when a Friend's behaviour is difficult for the Meeting to contain	Offering a Meeting for Clearness to an individual Friend
Holding a threshing meeting to find a way forward in supporting a member or attender	Asking for a meeting with Area Meeting Elders and Overseers to share concerns
Sharing examples of inappropriate behaviour with Elders and Overseers	Crying in meeting
Vocally eldering inappropriate ministry	Speaking to a Friend after Meeting about inappropriate ministry

Snakes and Ladders

Preparation:

For each group of 4 people prepare a square 'board' of 100 numbered squares (10 rows of 10).

Copy sheets of snakes and ladders.

Make copies of the playing instructions as below. (Note: the question can be changed/adapted to fit what the group is considering. Alternatives used have, for example, included 'consider what makes you feel cared about in and connected to your meeting'.)

For each group of 4 have one or two dice, four counters, scissors and pens.

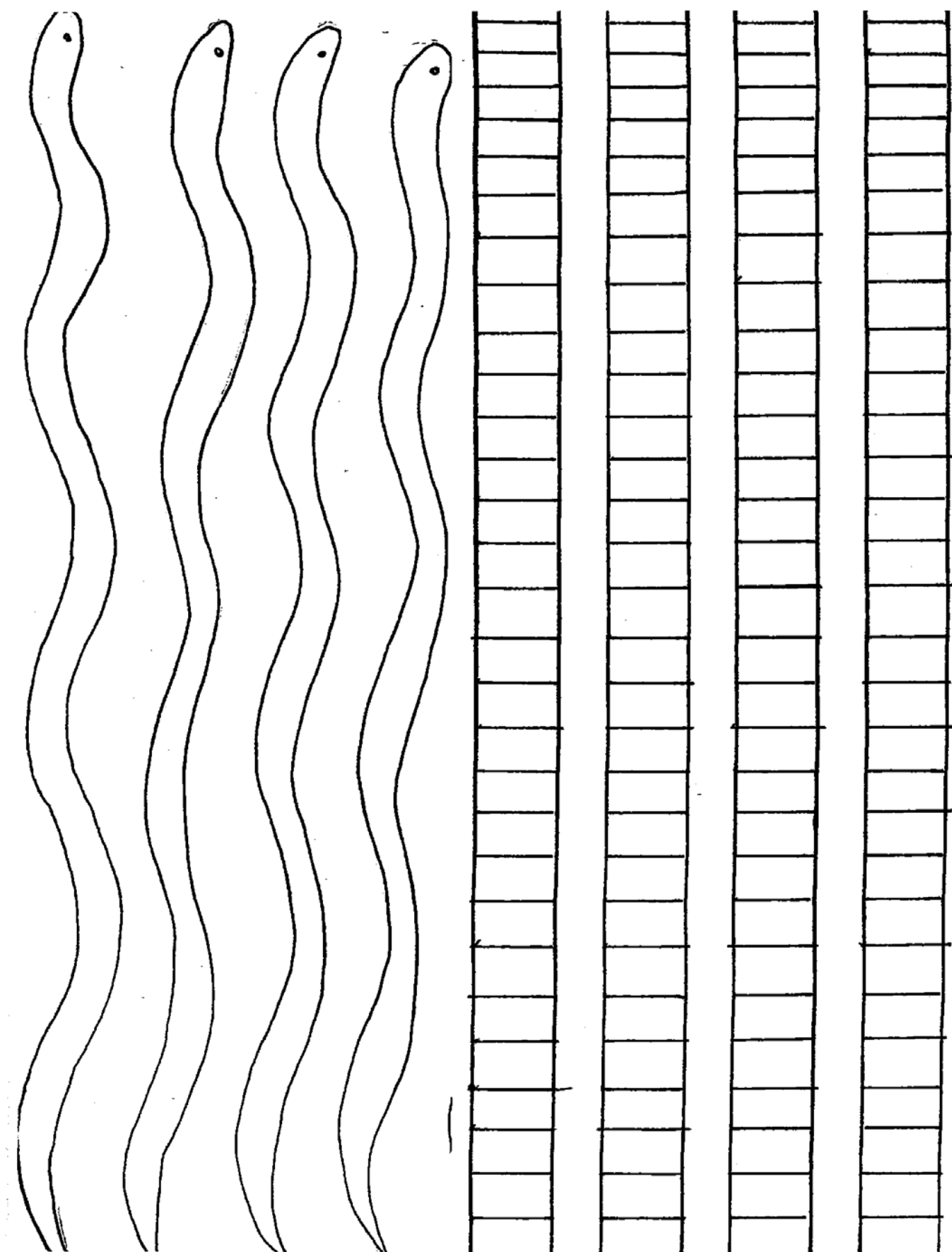
A game for up to 4 people.

Each group has a square 'board' showing numbers 1-100, blank snakes and ladders, 'blu-tak', 4 counters, a dice, scissors and pens.

- 1) Consider what supports your sense of well-being in your meeting and what depresses this feeling. Write or illustrate the positive examples on ladders cut to the appropriate length and those which depress these feeling on snakes, long or short.
- 2) Stick the snakes and ladders to the board so ladders carry you up from a lower to a higher number and snakes take you down, head to tail, from a higher to a lower.

Play the game and experience in your imagination travelling up and down other's snakes and ladders. Take a counter each. Take it in turn to throw the dice. Starting on the first square move forward the number of places shown on the dice. If you end at the base of a ladder move up it, if at the head of a snake move down it and start your next turn from this position. Continue until you reach 100 or as long as time allows.

Snakes and ladders templates



Quotes from *Encounters with mental distress*

Laminated copies of these slides are available from Quaker Life or the file that they can be printed from can be downloaded from, <https://groups.quaker.org.uk/groups/qln>.

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They trusted in me... I had a major breakdown while on a psychiatric social work course when I was 23 – before I became a Quaker. My employers were not always sympathetic.

I am bipolar. I can cope with the depressive elements, but need short hospital admissions when I go high. I have had excellent psychotherapy and my condition, with the help of medication, has remained stable for more than 20 years.

The acceptance of Friends has been important and has meant a lot to me. They trusted in me, even when I had difficulty in trusting myself.

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Some years ago there was a young man who unexpectedly began to be very disruptive in our Quaker Meeting. He had come to Quakers several years before from a strict, biblical and evangelical sect. His disruptive behaviour took the form of haranguing us, especially with biblical texts during Meeting for Worship, arguing with our processes within meeting and especially in Meeting for Business. He disputed the accuracy of minutes of meetings he had not attended and if he was at Meeting for Business he was negative and argumentative. The meeting was very troubled. Various members tried reasoning with him by talking and in writing.

One Sunday during Meeting for Worship he harangued us at length quoting biblical passages that 'proved our sinfulness' and finished by calling us Fascists.

In the ensuing silence one of our Young Friends, a young woman of 13 or 14, stood and with tears in her eyes said 'I don't know what a fascist is but I know I am not one' and sat down. Our disturbed Friend walked across the room, hugged her and returned to his seat. Peace was restored.

Some weeks later a friend happened to see him at the hospital in the waiting room of the Mental Health Unit. We did not really realise that he had mental health issues at the time of all the disturbance until being seen there. He came back to Meeting and was part of it.

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Some years ago, I was a Member of a meeting. My husband ... became ill and died. After his death I plunged into a deep depression, coupled with anxiety, on top of the grief. My GP referred me to the psychiatrist, and I was greatly helped by therapy and medication.

During this period I returned to meeting. Friends were sympathetic to my loss, of course, but as the months passed, the meeting continued 'as normal', but for me things never reverted to 'normal'. I found that the silence, in particular, was unbearable at this time. Silence, in fact, was associated in my mind with a deep existential fear and dread, which exhibited itself as a permanent 'silent scream' inside my head, which made it impossible to use the Quakerly silence in any constructive way.

I realise now that I was asking far too much of myself, too soon

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I was living in a new place where I knew no-one and my husband was starting a new demanding job. My son was born and welcomed by the overseers at the meeting to which I had just transferred my membership. I succumbed to acute post-natal depression necessitating hospitalisation.

Friends in the meeting were at a loss. The meeting offered to pick me up from the hospital for Meeting for Worship but this was too much of an ordeal. I only went once. I must have seemed difficult and ungrateful but what I really needed was the constant, undemanding support of an individual.

The local vicar's wife took in my husband and son and brought the baby to visit me regularly. Her kindness stays with me and motivated me to work with mentally distressed people. Eventually I came through and resumed going to meeting. But Friends did not refer to the reason for my long absence. I think they were embarrassed. I could have done with a sympathetic ear.

“

When words are strange or disturbing to you, try to see where they have come from and what has nourished the lives of others. Listen patiently and seek the truth which other people's opinions may contain for you. Avoid hurtful criticism and provocative language. Do not allow the strengths of your convictions to betray you into making statements or allegations that are unfair or untrue. Think it possible that you may be mistaken.

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A woman had worn out her welcome at other local churches and for months she disrupted worship and business with long tirades about social issues of the past which still preoccupied her.

Elders visited to discuss. Initially we were kind and polite and got nowhere. Then we tried speaking as though to a child: simply, bluntly and firmly, telling her that she must listen in Meeting for Worship and not speak every time.

At the same time we encouraged her to talk endlessly and repetitively afterwards with a few patient Friends and we set up a 'discussion group' to enable her to feel heard.

She has become considerably calmer, rarely speaks inappropriately and, equally important, her elderly husband is grateful for our acceptance and seems to value the hours' respite on Sunday mornings. And the discussion group continues and serves a different purpose.

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I MUDDLED THROUGH

... After a conviction for my gross misconduct as my life was going into meltdown, after being placed onto the sex offenders register, after a move to be with a new partner, now after learning to live with long-term unemployment, after finding a new and rewarding way of life in Christianity and Quakerism, after getting onto a good new combination treatment for bipolar disorder, after being clear of drugs for more than a couple of years now, after ongoing psychological input, after regular work with a lovely probation officer, after and because of all this, I'm a lot better. ... Still the illness has not gone, I do struggle with low moods, but I seem to be able to find my way out of them easier. ...

I have met with problems within Quakers with respect to my conviction—despite the way illness was linked. ... reassurance can be taken that while I'm well then my conduct is OK, but it's also seen that all I have to do is to get unwell and ... and as Isobel Lane said, 'Fear is very powerful'. It seems that I only pose a threat to people who don't know me, yet they are also the people in a position to give me employment and so a sense of worth in the world. I am sure after being rejected for a volunteer position with Friends. I was deemed apparently competent to do the job ... it was just a I posed a 'risk'. It seems to me that Quakers like to sing loudly about working in the prisons, about the heritage of 'fair treatment of the mentally ill ... but to have ex-offenders or the mentally unwell actually within the Society—in meetings for worship, or doing Quaker work—well, that's another matter.

You might say I'm extremely ambivalent though, because I also love the Society of Friends! It's been Friends who have helped me regain some self-respect, local Friends who have found me a number of little roles that let me feel valued. ... Above all, personally I hope to be able to turn a negative and still painful experience of rejection by Friends into something that leaves me feeling rather loved and valued than feared and mistrusted.

Contact details



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Mental Health in Meetings Cluster

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