Toolkit for action

Owning power and privilege

"If you have come here to help me, then you are wasting your time… But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

— Lilla Watson, Aboriginal activist.

QUAKERS

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Why owning power and privilege matters

As Quakers, we seek to find that of God in everyone. Because of our understanding of humanity as equal parts of a sacred whole, we feel the injustices of the world keenly, and seek change.

The Quaker faith invites us to speak truth to power in love and challenge those who treat people badly. But we all live within an unfair system, and it's easy to overlook exclusion and the impact of power dynamics in our own events and lives. Unless we challenge ourselves, we risk replicating injustice by default. That's because some inequalities have become normal – we've adapted to them, making them hard to 'see'. And yet inequality is a human problem with human solutions. To make equality a reality, we must choose different ways of being.

The concept of privilege – and the power that comes with it – has become a hot topic in recent years. It describes something important, making it a sensitive subject that requires care. Discussions of power and privilege often touch upon inequalities that divide us, at a personal as well as a social level. This includes differences in class, income, education, race and ethnic identity, gender, sexuality, age, the spectrum of disability, and personal wellbeing. When inequalities are explored and addressed, however, we can become stronger, more loving communities, and better equipped to do the work of social change.

What to expect from this toolkit

To help Friends who are committed to creating truly inclusive spaces, this guide contains some tried-and-tested tools and techniques for shifting power dynamics. If you know campaigners beyond the Quaker community, this is for them too.

Power and privilege are uncomfortable to explore, particularly if a critique relates to one's own advantages. It would be strange not to feel challenged when working on issues that confront how we feel about ourselves and how we behave towards others. This discomfort can be transformative. Shame and guilt, when handled with self-compassion, can be healed and replaced with healthy and positive feelings – of solidarity, of family, and of love.

Friends have a longstanding commitment to equality. However, it is not always obvious exactly what this requires of us. This booklet was originally conceived and delivered within Quaker Peace & Social Witness, a department of Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM). It is commended by the Social Justice Committee and the BYM Inclusion and Diversity Project.

It is a resource for starting a conversation, offered as a means of examining systems of privilege that shape our world. This conversation can be further advanced by skilled facilitation and workshops.

Case study:
A Quaker in Kingston & Wandsworth Area Meeting (AM)

"This is difficult stuff, a bit scary. You are asking a fish that has swum in the sea of privilege all his life to understand that a different kind of existence is possible; the warm, nourishing, right-feeling sea could be replaced. Or that it's warm and nourishing because it has been brewed from peoples' stolen lives.

I don't feel particularly powerful, but I have never been on the receiving end of the UK's systems for controlling its citizens. Police attention bypasses me. I don't need to deal with them, because the marks of privilege hang around me like a wasp's yellow and black bands, signs that say to officials, 'better leave this one alone, he could be troublesome for us'. But I have power. People listen to me.

I am a typical Quaker: white, middle class, educated, affluent. I have never had to worry seriously about affording any reasonable enjoyment. I assume my right to excellent health care and my ability to confront the system if it falls short of my reasonable expectations. My four children are healthy, educated in excellent schools and all of them went to good universities. And I have always assumed that these marks of privilege came to me without any detriment to others and that this was the nature of things, and that our grandchildren will, in due course, have the same opportunities.

Recently I took part in a simple exercise with a group of my peers. Our facilitator asked us to line up across the room, then posed privilege-related questions. If I recognised that I had been advantaged ("Did you go to university?"), one step forward. If disadvantaged ("Do people move away from you on the tube?"), one step back. By the end, some of us could not even see those behind us. They had become invisible as we advanced.

So, I am facing a dose of reality and it disturbs me very deeply. I must digest the idea that many of the things that make my experience of life were built on something deeply wrong. I have no easy way to make amends to people who I've never really seen behind me. This is a spiritual problem, and only a spiritual response can lead me to right action. Action without discernment would be ineffective and stupid. Maybe there is no action in the sense of Quaker leading. Only the humbled heart can learn well."

"Discrimination… may occur, and feelings may be hurt, by unthinking assumptions and lack of sensitivity. Being a Friend does not confer automatic protection against this, either as giver or receiver."

Quaker faith & practice 23.36

Key concepts: What do we mean by power?

1. The ability or capacity to do something or act in the way you choose.

2. The ability or capacity to direct or influence the behaviour of others or the course of events.

3. The expectation of entitlement to the above.

Here, we use the word power to describe the abilities and behaviours, both inherited and learnt, that help people influence their community and wider society. Power itself is neutral. In an abstract sense, it can damage or strengthen a community – sometimes both at once. It's all about being mindful to how power is applied. People working for social change are increasingly able to recognise and comprehend their own power or lack of it, and understand how they can use it to create inclusive communities.

For many of us, understanding power and privilege will be a matter of seeing both sides to this – how we are simultaneously disempowered and empowered by social structures and deep, embedded cultures, and how we can disadvantage others while at the same time being disadvantaged ourselves in other contexts.

Exercise: explore your power

Silent worship and the spoken word are central to Quaker ministry. The following exercise probes personal practice. The questions can be usefully explored in a group context.

- Does your identity help or hinder you in day-to-day life? In groups, do you feel that others would like you to step forward, or step back? Why is that?
- When you speak in a group, are you listened to? Do you create space to listen to others?
- When you propose a new idea, is it explored? If someone else offers a new idea, do you give it room to be heard?
- When people say something you disagree with, do you listen and does the way you address it result in change? When you say something others disagree with, is it heard and does it result in change?
- Are your answers the same across different contexts?

"Quakerism need not be defined exclusively as white, Christian and middle-class, and such culture need not be adopted as the culture of those who are convinced. When this does happen the inequalities and unequal power dynamics of our society are reflected in our meetings..."

Quaker faith & practice 10.13
Epistle of Black, white, Asian and mixed-heritage Friends, 1991

Key concepts: Everyone has different privileges

Privilege refers to the advantages a person can inherit from birth and/or accumulate over time. These advantages aren't innate – they're constructed by society, and can be seen where there are unexamined power relations. Everyone is privileged in different ways – your own privilege may lie within your genetics, upbringing, circumstances, or luck. Some are within our control, some are not.

Privilege is also related to context. You can enjoy advantages in one culture or social setting that can easily become disadvantages in another. Equally, we become immune to our privileges. For example, it is easy to forget how much privilege goes into something as basic as getting out of bed in your own home. It is natural to feel guilty or defensive when thinking about the experiences of those who don't have the freedom, wealth or physical wellbeing to do something so simple. The challenge is to accept and move on from those feelings, and find out what actions they may ask of you.

"People of faith are called to ask deep questions. This challenge may feel overwhelming, but it is necessary and presents opportunities for growth. We need to unlearn behaviours and assumptions we have as part of a group with privilege. We need to discover seeking racial justice as a spiritual practice."

Race and privilege, Quaker Council for European Affairs

Key concepts: Inclusion, not diversity

"Oppression in the extreme appears terrible: but oppression in more refined appearance remains to be oppression; and where the smallest degree of it is cherished it grows stronger and more extensive."

John Woolman, *Quaker faith & practice* 23.14

Diversity is a starting point, but it is not equality. A diverse space may still feel isolating for someone; perhaps the group expects them to fit in with established norms, or asks them to 'represent' their identity. Inclusion is the next step. A space where people with marginalised identities are able to change things to make it more welcoming and comfortable for others is inclusive.

Belonging encapsulates this.

A Quaker vision for groups

"All are heard, valued and supported both in our needs and our leadings. Everyone's contribution is accepted according to their gifts and resources. All are welcomed and included. There are clear and effective ways of working together on shared concerns. Fellowship and fun strengthen the bonds between us, enhancing a loving community."

Our faith in the future, Britain Yearly Meeting, 2015

Key concepts: Emotional labour and burnout

Emotional labour is the often invisible work of caring. Many people don't notice when others are feeling unhappy, or excluded, or ignored. Noticing these things can be painful, and encouraging a group to respond effectively to exclusion and suffering can be difficult. Creating an inclusive atmosphere will require emotional labour from you and those around you. It takes energy to be alert and responsive to how others feel, and while anyone can practise emotional labour, there is a social expectation that women will take care of it in most group scenarios.

As with any type of social change work, you will encounter resentment, criticism and avoidance from those who do not feel that change is needed (yet). When this happens it's important to take care of your own needs in order to keep going. Burnout is a real risk if you feel unable to put your own feelings first when you are 'off-duty'. It may be necessary to sit with the situation in meeting for worship. And it can be good to vent any frustrations to a trusted friend every once in a while!

Getting started

If you feel like the only person in your meeting or group that cares about addressing power and privilege issues, it's very daunting and can feel lonely. Here are four ways to get the ball rolling before you dive into tricky conversations with those who currently hold power.

Use existing structures

Talk over power dynamics with a group member who is responsible for setting agendas, facilitation, or eldership. What have they tried so far? What's working? What doesn't help? How can they support you?

Find an ally

Who is the most open to conversations about these topics? Make time to talk it over with them outside of the group. It's possible that you will find common ground and feel able to support each other in changing the wider culture together.

Listening and outreach

If there have been instances where people have left the meeting or group in the past, reach out to them and find out why. Was it a one-off thing, or part of a pattern? Finding space for everyone means listening with care to those who have fallen by the wayside.

Start group conversations

Propose a meeting to discuss power and privilege within your group or meeting. Notify members who tend to be less engaged and make sure they attend – they may find the discussion particularly relevant. Take notes of the meeting and circulate widely to ensure the collective learning is not lost. Keep having the conversation!

Skills and practices

Here are some practical things you and others can do to support an inclusive culture within your meeting.

Active listening

'The opposite of listening is preparing to speak.' Active listening is a skill in which the listener remains silent until the speaker finishes, then feeds back to the speaker what they have heard – this will help confirm what has been heard and allow both parties to ensure they have the same understanding. Active listening is a great way to give others enough space to speak without being interrupted. Speaking over others destroys trust; careful listening earns it.

Practising allyship

An ally isn't just something you become – it's something you do! You're an ally when you intervene when someone behaves in a discriminatory way. You're also an ally when you use your particular privileges in a way that the person you are in allyship with finds helpful.

Facilitating

Facilitation is the practice of adopting a neutral position within a meeting or workshop in order to help people move through a process together and draw out the opinions and ideas of the group members. When you

facilitate a meeting, you are responsible for setting expectations around how people are invited to participate, and how often.

Stepping back

If you have privilege within the group dynamic, use it to make speaking room for those who tend to go unheard. For example, if you are in a group where you've contributed lots but there are others that are yet to do so, you actively say 'I'm aware of how much I've spoken already so I'm taking a step back'.

Preventing burn-out

This is basically giving yourself and others around you a break. You all need to switch off and do whatever brings you a sense of wellbeing, no matter how brief or frivolous it may be. Being tired and stressed leads to illness, mistakes and resentment. Keep making time for the people and things you love, and remember the poet and activist Audre Lorde's words: 'caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare'.

Good allyship practice

Give space for people to share their experiences, if they wish to. Listen without offering your experiences as validation or counter-evidence.

Do your own research into the history of the injustice you seek to address.

Notice your implicit biases and take care to correct them.

If someone who has been marginalised wishes to speak or lead, support and amplify their work.

Consider how you contribute to or benefit from the injustice they have experienced.

Reflect how you can use your privileges to challenge injustice.

Things to watch out for

'Extracting' lessons on allyship and traumatic experiences from a marginalised person so you can learn from their pain.

Leaning on those you are acting in allyship with for advice, guidance and moral support.

Assuming every member of a marginalised group feels the same way.

Ignoring or taking credit for work done by marginalised groups active before you.

Responding defensively to criticism from those you aim to be in allyship with.

Giving too much weight to feeling guilt; avoiding taking action on a difficult issue altogether.

Attributes that will stand you in good stead

"Be honest with yourself. What unpalatable truths might you be evading? When you recognise your shortcomings, do not let that discourage you. In worship together we can find the assurance of God's love and the strength to go on with renewed courage."

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Practising solidarity

Solidarity is the act of standing alongside others and backing a cause that you aren't directly affected by, even if doing so disadvantages you in some way. It is one of the most powerful things you can do with social privilege and personal power. By showing up for others, we affirm each other's struggles, learn from each other, and grow in collective power. Solidarity is *not* about taking action on behalf of a less privileged person or group in a manner that is self-serving or plays into existing power imbalances.

Sitting with your discomfort

Learn to recognise when you find listening to the concerns of others difficult, and then learn to manage your reaction. When other people's experiences don't match our own, it can be disturbing. If they report that something bad happened to them that counters your own experience, this is an opportunity to listen, learn, and practise solidarity. Dismissing someone's bad experience implies that they are lying or delusional. Querying the conduct of a victim implies that you hold them responsible for the perpetrator's actions. Resist the urge to move the topic

onto 'safer' territory – this is known as derailing, and is a tactic that recentres the perspective of the more powerful/privileged members of the group.

Practising self-awareness

Reflect on your presence in meetings and discuss how to model the process of undoing traditional power dynamics.

- Did I listen to others without interrupting them?
- Did I take on suggestions that were not my own?
- Did I act in solidarity with someone who tends to be marginalised?

Practising self-compassion

If someone you love came to you with regrets about something they'd done, you would likely treat them with compassion. And yet it's very easy to be hard on ourselves for our mistakes. The ability to give yourself comfort frees you from harsh self-criticism, guides you to right action, and equips you well for challenges ahead.

Building resilience

It's important to listen when someone points out that you've reinforced a regressive power dynamic. Apologising and planning to avoid doing the same in future enables you and the group to move on positively.

Exercise: explore solidarity with your group

Watch the film *Pride* (2015) with your group and ask:

- What were the challenges/advantages of solidarity?
- How does solidarity reflect Quaker values?
- How does our group show solidarity? How might we?

Case study:
A Quaker in Hertford & Hitchen AM

I noticed only one black person at a conference with about 50 white people. I wondered how this was for them but felt uncertain about asking, so I left. At the end of the weekend, I was still concerned they might have felt isolated. I chose a moment when three of us were discussing our time together. At a recent training, the term 'people of colour' had been used so I decided to express my concern with that phrase. I said "I saw you were the only person of colour there, I was wondering what that was like". With a sigh they responded "and everyone else is colourless?" It was said kindly but I could tell I'd used the wrong term for this person. Thankfully they were not put off by my clumsiness and we had a good chat about instances of being treated badly or unexpectedly well by others.

There are many advantages to being white in the UK and I want to be alongside those who are not coloured white. The words I chose chime with some people, but not everyone, and here I got this wrong. I learnt when the person corrected me, and I felt their discomfort. I realise now curiosity can highlight inequality in a way that is painful. In future I would try to check with that person earlier so we could have chatted at the conference. Having rethought my approach, I remind myself, for me, this work is underlain not by an attitude of support, or even of a desire for solidarity, but of reparation.

Three techniques for difficult situations

Calling out

Asking someone to change their behaviour in front of other people is known as 'calling out'. It is effective in situations where someone is causing harm in a way that needs to be addressed promptly, for example if someone is using language that excludes someone present. It's okay to be called out now and then – most of us have blind spots that we need help to see. It is most effective as a loving intervention.

Calling in

Another approach to holding each other accountable for actions or words that reflect poorly on us. Calling someone in could look like speaking to someone after a meeting, sharing your concern about their behaviour and guiding them on how they might approach things differently.

"When I see problematic behavior from someone who is connected to me, who is committed to some of the things I am, I want to believe that it's possible for us to move through and beyond whatever mistake was committed. I picture 'calling in' as a practice of pulling folks back in who have strayed from us."

Ngọc Loan Trần, US activist

Behaviour, Impact, Feelings, Future (BIFF framework)

A simple method of speaking to someone about a disagreement or issue that you have had with them. Make sure you are aware that it is your perception of their behaviour. Focus on how their behaviour has affected you and how they can do things differently next time.

- **Behaviour**
  "When we met to discuss tactics, I noticed that you spoke over me a few times...
- **Impact**
  ... until it got awkward and I stopped making suggestions...
- **Feelings**
  ... When I left the meeting I felt really frustrated...
- **Future**
  ... I wanted to let you know so that in future, giving others space to speak will help with keeping everyone motivated to make this project a success."

Three ways to disrupt a hate crime

Don't be a bystander

The victims of verbal hate crimes often recall the people around them ignoring what is happening. Support the victim instead. Stand or sit beside them, and talk to them about something unrelated to whatever the attacker is saying until it is safe for you both to move away.

Film it and report it

If it feels safe to do so, film what is going on and report it to the police or www.stophateuk.org. It is difficult to secure justice if the harassment is not reported or is reported without evidence to back it up. If it feels too risky to record the incident, call the police.

Stick around for the victim

Shock and adrenaline mean the effects of the incident won't kick in until after the perpetrator has left the scene. Assisting the victim where possible – asking if they need help to ring a friend, waiting with them for assistance, staying with them while they get composure – can all go a long way.

Adapted from the video "5 Ways to Disrupt Racism" by VideoRev and the Racial Justice Network.

Educational resources

Here is a selection of key texts and articles to help deepen your knowledge of an issue, or share with others. Links are provided in a shortened bit.ly format to aid those reading the print edition.

On inclusion

Resources on inclusion and equality from a Quaker perspective from American Friends Service Committee: bit.ly/InclusionEqualityAFSC

How to do a diversity (or inclusive) welcome in a group setting from Training for Change: bit.ly/DiversityWelcome

www.healingjustice.org

On race

Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship: Quakers, African Americans, and the Myth of Racial Justice by Donna McDaniel and Vanessa Julye. Available from the Quaker Centre Bookshop: bit.ly/FitForFreedomBook

Why I'm No Longer Talking To White People About Race by Reni Eddo Lodge. Available from the Quaker Centre Bookshop: bit.ly/WhyImNoLongerTalking

'White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack' by Peggy McIntosh. A seminal text in understanding race relations: bit.ly/UnpackingTheKnapsack

Race and privilege by Quaker Council for European Affairs: bit.ly/QCEAraceprivilege

On ability

The social model of disability from Scope: bit.ly/ScopeSocialModel

BBC accessibility tips: bit.ly/AccessibilityOnline

'How to support someone who may be mentally unwell' from Mind: bit.ly/MindHelpingWithMentalIllness

On class

'It's not "them" – it's us!'from Class Matters. How to moderate inessential weirdness: guidelines for middle-class activists: bit.ly/ItsNotThem

'Tips from Working-Class Activists' from Class Matters: bit.ly/ActivistTipsClass

On gender and sexuality

The Will To Change: Men, Masculinity and Love by bell hooks

The Descent of Man by Grayson Perry

We Should All Be Feminists by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: bit.ly/WeShouldAllBeFeminists

Quaker Gender & Sexual Diversity Community. Resources and community for LGBT+ British Quakers. bit.ly/QGSDC

Quotes for reflection

"If we accept the notion, however subconsciously, that Quakerism really speaks only to certain types of people, then it seems to me we have totally denied its religious validity, its universal spirit and so we will have reduced Quakerism to the status of a social club with a mild religious overlay."

Alison Oldham
Keynote address to New England Meeting, 1984

"There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives. Our struggles are particular, but we are not alone. We are not perfect, but we are stronger and wiser than the sum of our errors."

Audre Lorde

"Because of their commitment to social concerns, some Quakers may find it inconceivable that they may lack understanding of issues involving racism. Jesus stressed the unique nature and worth of each individual. It is unreasonable to expect assimilation or to ignore difference, claiming to treat everyone the same. This denies the value of variety, which presents not a problem, but a creative challenge to live adventurously.

"Personality, sex, race, culture and experience are God's gifts. We need one another and differences shared become enrichments, not reasons to be afraid, to dominate or condemn. The media have increased our knowledge of the world, but we need greater self-awareness if our actions are to be changed in relation to the information we receive. We need to consider our behaviour carefully, heeding the command of Jesus that we should love our neighbours as we love ourselves."

Meg Maslin
Quaker faith & practice 23.33

Glossary

Terms that may 'name' what you see or experience

Quakers know how powerful words are. These terms are provided in the spirit of 'naming' things that we might all have felt or seen, but not had the words for.

Erasure and silencing: Dismissing, ignoring, or attacking someone's experiences or heritage; being shamed for experiencing something differently to how the dominant group experiences it.

Fetishisation: Giving someone high esteem based on their underrepresented or marginalised identity; using their symbolic presence to defend the actions of the group.

Gender: is often mistaken as being the same as sex. In fact, sex refers to the biological characteristics you were given at birth, whereas gender is a conscious part of your identity. Society often refers to only two gender identities; male and female. Gender is a spectrum and there are many more identities.

Gender identity: someone's concept of themselves as male or female, or both or neither. It includes how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. It can be the same or different than that which was assigned at birth

Inclusion: as opposed to diversity. Inclusion recognises every person as an equal member of the group, with valid rights, experiences and feelings.

Intersectionality: A word that describes the over-lapping nature of discriminations relating to class, ability, gender, sexuality – and race in particular. Coined by academic Kimberlé Crenshaw, a black woman, to describe black women's experiences of multiple oppressions.

Microaggression: a statement, action, or incident that subtly or unintentionally reflects bigotry towards a member of a marginalised group. For example, a jokey comment that puts a woman 'in her place'.

Mansplaining: when a man assumes that he knows more about a topic than the woman he is speaking to, and shares that knowledge without invitation in a condescending manner.

Whitesplaining: refers to the phenomenon when a white person does the above, in the context of a conversation with a person of colour.

Neo-colonialism: When descendants of colonisers prioritise and assume the universality of their financial or cultural needs and understanding over those of descendants of former colonies.

Patriarchy: The historic and current control by men, rather than women or both men and women, of most of the power and authority in a society or group.

People of colour: a term that includes all non-white peoples, emphasising their common experiences of systemic racism. American in origin, some people use it, some people don't, but it can be a helpful general term in some situations.

Prejudice: Holding an opinion based on conjecture rather than evidence or experience.

Queer: a self-identification term that rejects normative definitions of appropriate feminine and masculine sexual behaviour.

Self-determination: Where a group of people have power, resources and ability to make decisions about their own lives, independently of others if they choose.

Tokenism: using someone from an underrepresented group to 'window-dress' an event or campaign; rejecting their leadership on how that event or campaign is run.

Transgender (sometimes referred to as 'trans'): a general term to describe someone whose authentic gender does not match the one they were assigned at birth.

White saviour complex: characterized by the idea of 'rescuing' non-white people to look good, rather than working alongside others, taking leadership from them, and learning to be in solidarity across historical and socially constructed divides.

White supremacy: the idea white people are superior to non-white people, and therefore should hold social, cultural, political and economic power, and repress the social, cultural, political and economic power of BAME people. In practice, this can be subtle, eg, only consuming culture made by white people.

Some of these terms describe behaviours used to uphold existing power structures that privilege particular groups. Those behaviours have historical roots; for example, neo-colonialism, the white-saviour complex and white supremacy are legacies of European colonialism.

The origins of different oppressions is too big a topic for this guide, but are relevant to understanding the issues discussed. The texts provided in the educational resources section may serve as a starting point for further exploration.

About this guide

This guide was written by Suki Ferguson, Quaker Peace & Social Witness Communications Officer, adapted from the New Economy Organisers Network (NEON) Power & Privilege Handbook (2015). With thanks to Jannat Hossain and Tatiana Garavito. Edited by Edwina Peart.

NEON is a UK-based organisation that exists to strengthen the movement working to replace neoliberalism with an economy based on social and environmental justice.

Find out more at www.neweconomyorganisers.org.

Published May 2018. Second edition October 2018.

About Quakers

Quakers share a way of life, not a set of beliefs. Our unity is based on shared understanding and a shared practice of silent worship, where we seek a communal stillness.

Quakers seek to experience God directly, within ourselves and in our relationships with others and the world around us. We meet for worship in local meetings, which are open to all who wish to attend.

Quakers try to live with honesty and integrity. This means speaking truth to all, including people in positions of power. The Quaker commitment to peace arises from the conviction that love is at the heart of existence and that all human beings are unique and equal. This leads Quakers to put faith into action by working locally and globally to change the systems that cause and perpetuate injustice and violent conflict.

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0632.QPSW.0418