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for 24 years. She attended a Quaker high school and graduated from Swarthmore with a B.A. in psychology. She is a mother of two CFS alumni and a current parent. Ida is a graduate of the Institute for Engaging Leadership, a two-year Quaker Education program. She is also a published poet and an artist who loves to explore relationships, nature, and how the two intersect.



Holly Bourne is a parent of a Middle School student and an Upper School student at Carolina Friends School.

She currently works

as an Organizing Consultant, focusing on creating calm and orderly spaces that minimize stress and invite positive energy. She enjoys yoga, photography, and spending time with her family. You may visit her website at www.hollyhbourne.com

is silence good for you?

In a world providing endless activity and distraction, a little bit of silence is a welcome relief. But is it actually good for you? Recent scientific studies suggest that it is.

A 2013 study conducted by Duke biologist Imke Kirste looked at the effect of noise on adult mice. Kirste exposed the mice to three types of noise: music, white noise, and infant mouse calls. The control group experienced silence. In the first three groups, sounds produced some positive effects in the brain but the control group experiencing silence actually developed new brain cells in the hippocampus, a part of the brain that encodes memory. Kirste hypothesized that the unnatural experience of silence prompted the mouse brains to actually increase in activity.

Physician Luciano Bernardi showed how silence can be beneficial to health in his 2006 study of the effect of music on the brain. Bernardi exposed test subjects to six

types of music and measured various health markers such as blood pressure and brain circulation. He discovered that randomly inserted stretches of silence had a larger effect than the music itself. Silent pauses between stretches of music proved to be far more relaxing to the brain than either “relaxing” music or a longer silence played before the experiment started. The effect of silence in this case seemed to be heightened by sharp contrast, allowing the subjects to pay careful attention and then release attention.

Quakers believe that when we are silent, allowing all of the outer world’s distractions to fall away, we can truly hear the wisdom that we each possess. We practice silence at Settling In and Settling Out, during Meeting for Worship, and often at the beginning of a class or meeting to help us get centered and prepare to listen to that wise inner self.

Silence supports the health of our community. It can lead to a healthy

mindfulness, allowing us to calmly acknowledge and accept our feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations. We see the positive benefits in our classrooms every day.

At our School, we are committed to the work of building a community of trust, care, acceptance, and celebration of all kinds of difference. In order to fully open ourselves to celebrating others, we must first celebrate and know ourselves. Practicing silence allows that opportunity. Through marked times of silence purposefully built into our daily and weekly schedules, we spend time with ourselves while we sit with others. It allows us time to focus on the joy and love that surround us and appreciate the ways in which we are all connected.

In our always on, wired world, experiencing silence may seem impossible. But carving out some time for silence could be therapeutic and even make us smarter. Now that is something to be quiet about. **|||**

Carolina Friends School is an independent Quaker school serving students aged 3-18. Contact the school at: 4809 Friends School Road, Durham, NC 27705; Telephone: 919-383-6602; www.cfsnc.org