

Reducing The Risk of Child Sexual Abuse at Friends Meeting at Cambridge

Minute of Concern

We cherish the children and youth in the Friends Meeting at Cambridge community and the trust that they show in us as caring adults.

We believe that children and youth need a whole community that cares about them and actively engages with them. As a result, we welcome and encourage loving engagement between the adults and young people of our Meeting.

We are sadly aware that sexual abuse of children and youth occurs in religious communities as well as in the wider society. We are therefore committed to policies and procedures that will help us reduce the risk of harm happening to our beloved children and youth while in our care and elsewhere.

Our work as a meeting includes raising awareness within the community, including adults, youth and children, about sexual abuse risk reduction and response.

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Policy to Reduce the Risk of Sexual Abuse for Children and Youth at Friends Meeting at Cambridge (approved 3/12/06)

Introduction

Those of us who work with our children and youth at FMC have been given a trust: to help them grow in the Spirit, and to grow safely. While attention is often focused on the content of our programs, we are also conscious that our way of being with children and youth is as important as the content of the program provided – children and youth follow our lead, and we teach mostly by example. In order to ensure the physical, emotional and spiritual safety of participating children and youth, the working group on Child Abuse Prevention and Response (CAPR) proposes that FMC agree on some guidelines for the work.

There are many definitions of child/youth sexual abuse. For the purposes of this document, we will characterize child/youth sexual abuse in the following way: Any sexual act (including sexual contact and such non-contact acts as exhibitionism, exposure to pornography, voyeurism, and communicating in a sexual manner, including by phone or internet) involving a minor (or minors) in which one party exerts power over the other – for example, via a significant age or developmental difference, psychological coercion, physical force, or extreme social pressure. (We do not intend through this characterization to make a legalistic judgment about consensual teen sexual activity. For the purposes of our policy, we are concerned about abuses of power and authority. Please read the above characterization in that light.) It is our hope/goal to respond to anyone in our community accused of perpetrating abuse in a way that is loving AND holds any abuser accountable for his or her actions. The specifics of how we respond will vary depending on many factors, including the age of the accused person, but love and accountability will be our guiding principles.

While it is extremely important that episodes of abuse be detected and perpetrators identified, we believe a major focus of the Meeting's work should involve implementation of safeguards that will decrease the risks of child sexual abuse occurring within the Meeting, recognizing that it is not possible to guarantee the prevention of child abuse.

In recent years, we have been made aware of the potential for hurt and abuse of children and youth in many faith communities. The effects of the sexual abuse of children of both genders in a faith community are catastrophic and far-reaching. Everyone is hurt – the abused person may carry scars and memories for an entire lifetime; the victim's family and friends can be traumatized; the community in which the abuse occurs may be deeply wounded and divided, and the perpetrator lives in a world of isolation and secrecy. There is also the risk that he or she may continue the abusive behavior. In instances where allegations prove false, there is still damage done to all involved. Reputations may be unjustly destroyed, and the seeds of distrust may live on in the community for years afterwards.

No segment of society, including the Religious Society of Friends, is immune to the dangers of sexual abuse. In fact, many in our own FMC community are still healing from an incident of abuse that occurred more than a decade ago. If we are honest with ourselves as Friends, we acknowledge that the same potential for hurt exists in our community as in others, and that mindfully attending to issues of safety is the best way to protect individuals and the community. Having worshipfully considered the issues around questions of child safety, the CAPR committee makes the following policy suggestions in the belief that care, tenderness, and attention in this area not only make our children and youth safer, but also make us stronger as a community.

Like other monthly meetings, FMC has constraints of time, resources and availability of caretakers. However, we believe FMC's attention to "reducing the risk" is a measure of our commitment to our children, our youth and our religious community. We act in the faith that if these issues are important to us, way will open.

A note on policy versus recommended practice

Below, CAPR has laid out proposals for a policy. This policy is intended to set out the broad framework through which we shall seek to minimize risk to our children and youth. Once the policy is adopted, there is a legal obligation that it be followed. The policy will be implemented through more specific practices that will be modified and updated as necessary on an ongoing basis.

Policy

The following policy will apply to all individuals whom Friends Meeting at Cambridge asks to care for the children and youth of Friends Meeting at Cambridge in any capacity, whether as First Day School teachers, assistant teachers, retreat leaders, as chaperones or drivers on outings away from the Meeting, or in any other capacity. The purpose of this policy is to reduce the risk of an incident of sexual abuse occurring to our children/youth while under the care of the Meeting. [NOTE: "Child/Youth worker" or "worker" will refer to all paid and volunteer staff for FMC youth and children's programs, including retreats.]

Qualifications and Screening for Child/Youth Workers

1. All individuals working with children/youth, regardless of the length of time as members/attenders, will be screened. Screening may include an application form, references, and an interview, as well as a release for FMC to check beyond the named references and to perform some form of criminal background check.
2. New attenders must wait six months before being screened and approved to have responsibility with FMC children/youth. (An exception may be made if the applicant came directly from another Friends Meeting and has references for his or her work with children there.)
3. Youth workers will be mature and responsible adults who are no less than three years older than the youth being served. Workers under eighteen will be in an assistant capacity under the direct supervision of an adult youth worker.

Expectations and Training of Youth Workers

4. A code of conduct will be read and signed by all child/youth workers. (See Appendix.)
5. A training will be developed and offered regularly to child/youth workers. Training may include a job description, resource information, crisis procedures, mandated reporting laws, and information about abuse and neglect.

Program guidelines

6. Safeguards will be provided through careful monitoring and staffing.

7. Child/youth workers (including retreat planners) will engage in a risk assessment to determine the appropriate levels of supervision at the beginning of any new activity and as part of a review of any regular programs or activities. Factors such as isolation, accountability, and age/power differences between caretakers and youth (or among youth) can be considered in evaluating the risk involved in a given activity.

8. Youth and children will be regularly educated regarding sexuality, personal boundaries and assertiveness, appropriate to the age.

Reporting Suspected Abuse

9. All Mandated Reporters at FMC have a responsibility to know and comply with the Massachusetts mandated reporting laws and the Meeting's mandated reporter protocol. In brief, child/youth workers who suspect a child is suffering from abuse or neglect have the responsibility to ensure that it is reported to appropriate persons in the Meeting and to appropriate state authorities as well. (See FMC's Mandated Reporter protocol for details.)

10. The First Day School and Youth Programs coordinators have a responsibility to educate the child/youth workers about Mandated Reporting laws and practices.

Responding to Allegations of Abuse by FMC staff or volunteers

11. A written plan exists for the Meeting's response to suspicions or allegations of physical or sexual abuse of a child by FMC staff or volunteers. (See Appendix.)

12. A Response Committee will put the response plan into action when necessary. The core Response Committee will consist of the Presiding Clerk, the First Day School Coordinator, the Friend in Residence, a representative from Ministry and Counsel and one from Trustees. Liaisons to the Response Committee will be appointed by Personnel, First Day School, Youth Programs, Care and Support, and Marriage and Family Life committees, in case the Response committee considers their participation to be needed.

Recordkeeping

13. Confidential personnel files will be kept for all workers who have assigned responsibilities for children/youth. Included will be information from the screening process and documentation of any allegations. All files related to personnel and any alleged incidents will be kept permanently and confidentially (in a secure place with limited access).

Institutionalizing Child Protection at Friends Meeting at Cambridge

14. Responsibility for ensuring implementation and evaluation of this policy and its associated practices over time, will be handled by the FDS Coordinator and Youth Programs Coordinator in their respective programs, working with an ex-officio CAPR Advisory Committee (Friend in Residence, the Presiding Clerk, and the clerks of or liaisons from the First Day School and Youth Programs committees).

15. There will be a yearly community-wide opportunity for adults in the Meeting to learn more about sexual abuse awareness.

Practices to support FMC's Risk-Reduction Policy (3-06)

(The numbers below correspond to the number of the policy item being addressed. Most of these practices are already in place at FMC.)

Qualifications and Screening

- (1) Screening currently includes an application form, references, and an interview with two screeners, as well as a release for FMC to check beyond the named references and to perform some form of criminal background check.

Expectations and Training

- (3) See Appendix for code of conduct.
- (4) FDS Coordinator is responsible for seeing that training for child/youth workers is done. This will include a once-a-year gathering for training (perhaps with an outside expert hired for the purpose); a review of safety issues during the in-person screening interview; and a packet that includes the Mandated Reporter protocol, a pamphlet on preventing sexual abuse of children, relevant web addresses, safety check-lists, and other informative items.

Program Guidelines

- (6) Safeguards at FMC currently include:
 - a. At least two un-related adults are assigned to each class (and will be assigned to child care for Meeting events), and when one of the teachers cannot be present, a substitute is found. If children go outdoors to play, they will be accompanied by two unrelated adults. If for some temporary reason only one adult is available, a roamer will check in periodically.
 - b. There are windows in all classroom doors, and the FDS coordinator and others "check-in" during class. Parents and staff may enter or leave any classroom at any time.
 - c. We provide information about risk reduction and awareness for parents, volunteers, and other members of the community.
 - d. For transportation during an event, all drivers are at least 21 years of age and have proof of insurance. Seatbelts are required for all passengers. Written permission for youth under eighteen is obtained from parents.
 - e. Expectations of participant behavior are clearly communicated and age-appropriate. They include: attendance at scheduled program, refraining from substance abuse and sexual activity, responsible free time activity, responding to caretaker instructions.
 - f. Feedback process: We provide opportunities for evaluation by participants and parents through written (including anonymous) and/or verbal feedback. There are regular reports of activities, including annual reports from FDS Coordinator and Youth Programs Coordinator to their committees. A written record of these reports is kept.
 - g. Our programs strive for openness in planning and publicity of events and activities. This openness includes communication ahead of time with the parents and community, with written description and announcements and/or an invitation to parents and community members to attend, participate and observe the events.
 - h. For events out of the scope of normal activities, approval of parents or guardians is sought.
 - i. There is a well-publicized written process for reporting any suspected abuse or improper behavior. (See Protocol for Response to Allegations of Child Abuse at FMC 11/8/05) All staff and volunteers with children receive the FMC Mandated Reporting protocol.
 - j. Safety checklists are available for those working in the following: childcare for FMC retreats; youth retreats; and field trips.
 - k. Regularly scheduled childcare employees have received training in First Aid and CPR.

- (8) FDS Coordinator and Youth Programs Coordinator will be responsible for making sure that children and youth receive age-appropriate education at least once a year regarding sexuality, personal boundaries, and assertiveness. Should there not be skilled resource persons for this task available in the Meeting, they may choose to use the services of an outside person expert in this field.

Reporting Suspected Abuse

- (9) Please see Appendix for FMC's protocol for reporting suspected neglect or physical or sexual abuse of a Meeting child or youth.

Responding to Allegations of Abuse

- (11) Please see Appendix for Protocol for Response to Allegations of Child Abuse at FMC.

Recordkeeping

- (13) Each person's folder is available to them for review, and that person can add material to their folder at any time. Recordkeeping for volunteers will be handled by the Child Safety Screener (a temporary position) and/or the First Day School Coordinator. Record keeping for paid staff is handled by the Personnel committee.

Institutionalizing Child Protection at Friends Meeting at Cambridge

- (14) Administrative tasks involved in ensuring the ongoing success of this policy and related practices will include the following:
- Monitor changes in Massachusetts law that might affect the policies and practices
 - Check-in yearly with legal consultant and abuse consultant to make sure they are still willing to be called should there be an allegation.
 - Make sure there is an annual educational event for adults about child sexual abuse risk reduction and response. (Pastoral committees responsible for this, with assistance from FDS Coordinator.)
 - Review the policy and practices yearly, using an evaluation tool to be developed by the CAPR committee before it is laid down: Are we following the Meeting's approved child sexual abuse risk-reduction and response policy? Are changes needed?
 - Make sure appropriate policy/practice changes are made (via the Monthly Meeting if necessary).
 - Notify the Monthly Meeting when a new working group is needed for major work on the policy.
 - Keep current and available any necessary informational materials for child/youth workers and the meeting at large.
 - Make annual report to the Monthly Meeting about child abuse risk-reduction and response work at FMC.
- (15) A community-wide educational event on a regular basis (e.g. once a year) contributes to a culture of safety and sensitivity that will empower everyone to uphold standards of accountability. (The event could consist of a talk by an expert in child abuse risk reduction, followed by Q and A.) This groundwork will support the maintenance of the risk-reduction policy and the work of youth workers. Responsible for the event will be a team of the Response committee liaisons from three pastorally-oriented committees: Ministry and Counsel, Marriage and Family Life, and Care and Support, reminded as necessary by the First Day School Coordinator. In this way, these three committees will stay alert to child protection issues at FMC, and the burden of caring for our children's safety will not fall exclusively on First Day School committee.

Code of Conduct for Youth Workers at Friends Meeting at Cambridge (11-05)

(“Child/youth workers”- or “C/Y workers”- refers to all paid and volunteer staff for FMC youth and children’s programs, including retreats.)

Child/Youth workers with Friends Meeting at Cambridge have been given a sacred trust – to help the youth and children of FMC grow in the Spirit, and to grow safely. In light of this responsibility, C/Y workers are called on to meet specific expectations in their work:

- 1) Appropriate interpersonal boundaries – Adults should model respectful and nurturing behavior – youth will follow their lead. Adults should be attentive to appropriate dress, use of language, and demonstrations of affection and encouragement. Adults should never intentionally engage in contact with the “bathing suit” area of a child/youth’s body.
- 2) In the area of physical expression of affection, a general guideline might be –allow the child or youth to initiate the hug, and expect the C/Y worker to end it. Whenever questions arise about appropriate expressions of affection, C/Y workers are reminded that they are the adults, and they have the responsibility to behave maturely. All persons have different comfort levels with touch, and youth workers should be sensitive to each individual’s boundaries.
- 3) There should be no sexualized behavior – Teasing and joking with sexual overtones and content is not acceptable.
- 4) “Friendship” with youth – C/Y workers can serve as important mentors and guides for youth, and in this way might be seen as friends to individual youth. But FMC programs are to serve the children and youth, and not the needs of the workers. A C/Y worker who “needs” young friends may present boundary problems for both youth and other staff. Any relationship with children or youth outside the program should be undertaken only with the knowledge and consent of the youth or child’s parent or guardian; supervisory staff should be made aware of those activities.
- 5) C/Y workers for FMC are responsible not only to children and youth, but to their families and FMC as well. If you suspect that a child or youth is a victim of abuse, is suicidal, or has a serious drug problem, you must not keep such information to yourself. For this reason, please try never to give children or youth the impression that you will keep secrets for them. When the information is of a major crisis nature, encourage the child or youth to seek help from a parent or other authority figure. Please consult with your supervisor or the First Day School Coordinator about an appropriate course of action. Read and understand the Advice on One-on-One Conversation (below), as well as the FMC Mandated Reporting protocol.

“I agree to abide by this code of conduct in my work with the children/youth of Friends Meeting at Cambridge.

signed:_____ date:_____

*** Advice on One-on-One Conversation

One-on-one conversation can provide important mentoring for young people, not to be avoided, but to be handled with care. Pay attention to isolation: Whenever possible, find a spot in a space that is not isolated, indoors or outdoors, where you can be observed; in a small room, keep the door ajar. Ask if there is anyone else who could helpfully be present, youth or adult. Maximize accountability: speak about the session to the coordinator or other staff, even if in a general way to maintain confidentiality. Make sure that any crisis situation gets immediate attention. Attend to power and control dynamics: Place yourself opposite the youth, making sure that you are not between them and the door. Any physical contact should be reassuring, but considerate of physical boundaries and emotional vulnerability.

Reporting Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect at Friends Meeting at Cambridge (3-06)

What volunteers and other community members need to know.

Who are the mandated reporters at FMC?

Under Massachusetts law, certain members of our Friends Meeting community (including the Presiding Clerk, the Friends in Residence, and all people paid to work with children or youth) are “mandated reporters” – that is, they are legally required to report to the Department of Social Services (DSS) any instances of suspected physical or sexual child abuse or neglect that come to their attention while they are performing their services for the Meeting.

Who are permissive reporters at FMC?

All in the FMC community are allowed to report suspected child abuse or neglect, and the more prepared we all are to recognize possible signs of these, the safer the children in our community will be. In addition, especially when permissive reporters help with the children of the meeting (as in volunteering to teach first day school), they may be seen by the court system as extensions of, or acting on behalf of, FMC. Thus while permissive reporters are not legally “required” to report suspected child abuse or neglect, FMC may in some cases be found negligent if they do not report. The information in this pamphlet are intended to be helpful to everyone in the FMC community as we work together to create a safe and encouraging environment for the Meeting’s children.

Definition of child sexual abuse:

We will define child sexual abuse as any contact or interaction between a child and an adult in which the child is being used for the sexual stimulation of the adult; any sexual act between an adult and a minor or between two minors when one exerts power over the other, forcing, coercing or persuading a child to engage in any type of sexual act, which includes sexual contact, and such non-contact acts as exhibitionism, exposure to pornography, voyeurism, and communicating in a sexual manner by phone or internet.

A report should be made:

- if someone in the Meeting tells you that they have abused a child
- if a child in the FMC community tells you that he or she has been abused (either at Meeting or anywhere)
- if you observe directly signs of abuse or neglect in a child in the FMC community

Some signs that might indicate sexual abuse: “too perfect” behavior; withdrawal; depression; unexplained anger and rebellion; sexual behavior and language that are not age-appropriate; physical problems associated with anxiety, like chronic stomach pain or headaches; physical signs like redness, rashes or swelling in the genital area, urinary tract infections.

Some signs that might indicate physical abuse: bruises, cuts, red marks or unexplained injuries; fearfulness of certain people or loud noises; hyper-alertness; withdrawal.

Some signs that might indicate neglect: poor or inadequate clothing, nutrition, supervision, or dental and medical care.

Please note that although these symptoms do not prove abuse, they are warning signs of possible problems.

What should I do if I learn of or suspect abuse?

For help in judging whether a report to the DSS is called for, you can consult the Presiding Clerk, Friend in Residence, or First Day School Coordinator. These Friends can also offer support during the challenging emotional experience of making a report, and provide you with an incident form to assist you in making a report. Or, you can call the DSS anonymously and describe a situation that you have concerns about. The DSS representative should be able to help you judge whether a report is advisable. (Call 1-800-792-5200, a 24-hour hotline.)

What are the legal repercussions of making a report?

According to the law: No mandated reporter shall be liable to civil or criminal action by reason of such a report. No other person (i.e. someone who is not a mandated reporter) who makes such a report shall be liable in any civil or criminal action by reason of such report if such report is made in good faith; provided, however, that the person reporting did not perpetrate or inflict the abuse or cause the neglect. (We interpret “in good faith” to mean the reporter has a sincere and honest belief and concern. Good faith does not require that the reporter know for certain.)

Consistent with Massachusetts law, FMC will not discharge or in any manner retaliate against any “permissive” reporter who in good faith makes such a report, or testifies or is about to testify in any proceeding involving child abuse or neglect.

Please remember that our concern at FMC doesn’t start with a report to the DSS.

There are many measures in place in the care and nurture of our young people at FMC that support protection and awareness. To learn more about these, please contact the FDS Coordinator, the Friend in Residence, or the Presiding Clerk.

Nor does our concern stop with a report to the DSS.

In an earlier occasion of abuse of a child of our meeting by a FDS volunteer, we prayed for, and were given, the ability to offer support to all involved, including the perpetrator. We will seek such Light should any future instances occur.

A more detailed version of this document is available at the meeting office.

Protocol for Response to Allegations of Child Abuse at FMC (3-06)

FMC will appoint a Response Committee to coordinate response to allegations of abuse of an FMC child or youth. This committee will be representative of the community as a whole and small enough to be able to mobilize into action quickly if need be. The core Response Committee (RC) will consist of: the Presiding Clerk, Friend in Residence, First Day School Coordinator, and a representative each from Ministry and Counsel and Trustees. Other committees will be asked to appoint liaisons whom the core Response Committee can call in as appropriate: Personnel, First Day School, Care & Support, Youth Programs (and YP Coordinator), Marriage and Family Life.

Please note:

a. A range of situations may come before the RC. The most extreme would be sexual abuse alleged to have been perpetrated by an FMC volunteer or staff member during or as a result of an FMC program. In those cases, the RC would follow every step listed below.

b. FMC's Mandated Reporter document outlines the MA requirements and FMC protocol for reporting suspected neglect or physical or sexual abuse of a child or youth to the DSS. If those working with children/youth suspect that physical or sexual abuse or neglect is occurring anywhere in a child's life (including the home), they may (and in some cases are required to) report suspected abuse to the Department of Social Services (DSS). In these instances, the RC can be a resource but may not see fit to follow every one of the steps below.

c. The appendix to the New England Yearly Meeting's proposed Child Abuse Prevention Policies and Procedures contains useful material that will be of use to FMC's RC as it carries out its tasks.

d. The Response Committee (RC) is encouraged to keep in mind, and freely remind the meeting of, the centrality of worship at a time when there may be pain, confusion, shock, fear, disbelief, anger.

Within the first 24 hours of an allegation coming to its attention, the Response Committee's function will include the following:

1. Receive, review and monitor any report of child abuse. Be available (all or a selected number) to meet with any potential reporter who is unsure whether there is enough information for a report to be made to the Department of Social Services, or who otherwise feels the need of consultation and support. (The issue here is whether or not there is enough information for a report to be made, not whether or not the person committed child abuse. The only group who has authority to conduct an investigation is DSS.)

2. If the alleged perpetrator is an FMC volunteer or staff member, take steps to stop all contact between the alleged perpetrator and children under the care of FMC for the period of the DSS investigation.

3. Notify the parent or guardian of the child that a report is being made and provide support as necessary and as requested by the child and family. (If the alleged perpetrator is a parent or guardian, the RC might choose to delay this step until the safety of the child is secured.) Ideally this initial contact should occur before or as the report is filed. Additional support may include setting up a support committee, referral for services such as counseling or victim's advocate, transportation to hospital/physician for evaluation etc.

4. Notify the alleged perpetrator that the report has been made (again, attending first to the safety of the child if necessary). Provide referral to services, including a support committee. Clarify with the alleged perpetrator any restrictions the RC deems necessary on his/her activity or responsibilities within the community to maintain child safety for the duration of the DSS investigation.

5. Notify the following of the report, as appropriate: insurance agent, legal advisor (chosen for expertise in child abuse allegations), and abuse consultant (an advisor, preferably from outside FMC, chosen for her/his psychological/social expertise in these matters).

6. Plan and conduct community education (e.g. letter to the community, gatherings for information, worship, reflection) throughout the investigation period and afterwards as necessary. Those who are implementing this step must be mindful of appropriate confidentiality (see #7).

7. Take appropriate steps to keep information confidential. Only those with supervisory or organizational need-to-know should be informed of the identity of the alleged victim and alleged perpetrator, unless permission is given otherwise.

8. Refer all media inquiries to the member of the RC selected as the media liaison for that year.

9. If the DSS decides not to conduct an investigation, and the RC still feels concern about an allegation about an FMC child/youth worker, the RC will seek to discern the appropriate steps to ensure ongoing safety for all (children, worker, family), pursuing appropriate follow-up with all involved.

Timing

Massachusetts law requires that a report of suspected abuse be made by phone immediately, and then in writing, within 24 hours. Members of the FMC community who make such a report are asked to notify a member of the RC immediately that a report is being filed. If the report has been made by someone outside FMC, the RC will become active as soon as notification comes that a report has been filed.

Preparation and other logistics

Each summer the Presiding Clerk will gather those who will be serving on the RC that year (July 1-June 30). The group will choose its clerk for the year, make sure all members have the information they need in order to conduct the committee's work, designate a liaison to the media, and arrange how they will reach each other in an emergency. (Information available will include this protocol, mandated reporter protocol, a checklist of recommended steps, and a copy of the reporting form.) At the time of the summer meeting, the RC will check on the Meeting's ongoing relationship with a legal advisor and an abuse consultant, arranging to replace them if they are no longer able to serve in that role. The M&C representative will arrange to meet with liaisons to Marriage and Family Life and Care and Concern to plan a yearly educational/awareness event. (See Practices # 13.) Each September/October the RC will publicize its existence, function, and protocol to the Meeting as a whole. Each spring, the RC will report briefly to the Monthly Meeting.