

Concord Quarterly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends Child-Safety Protection Policy and Procedures

We, the members of Concord Quarterly Meeting, cherish our children and wish to do everything possible to ensure a safe environment where they are free from the possibility of physical and sexual abuse. To that end, we have developed policies and procedures to protect our children when they are at events sponsored by the Quarterly Meeting or otherwise in the care of Quarterly Meeting staff, paid child-care providers, and/or volunteers. Following the guidelines recommended by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and GuideOne Insurance, we have adopted the policies and procedures outlined in this document.

Policy

This policy, and the procedures that follow, apply to all persons who work with or otherwise offer care to children and youth at Concord QM events. The phrase “children and youth” is defined as including anyone under the age of 18; likewise, the terms “child,” “children,” and “minors” are defined as persons under the age of 18. “Youth and child-care workers” refers to all persons working with children and youth, paid and unpaid.

1. All youth and child-care workers who provide care or lead or otherwise participate in QM children’s and youth activities on a regular basis will be subject to reference checks by the Quarter, unless this has been done already and documented at the Monthly Meeting or Yearly Meeting level. References may come from the Monthly Meeting, where it is expected that the person will be known and have participated actively in the Meeting for at least six months. Checks will be repeated every five years for ongoing workers. Only those with clear records will be considered for work with children and youth.
2. All employees of the Quarterly Meeting, and all youth and child-care workers who have regular supervisory roles, or who will have overnight responsibility for children, or who may be in a one-on-one counseling or mentoring relationship with minors at QM events, will be subject to reference checks and criminal/child-abuse background checks, unless this has already been done and documented at the MM or YM level. The checks, which individuals must consent to in writing, will be performed by authorized PYM staff using approved, confidential, Internet-based services that utilize appropriate national and statewide databases. Only those with clear records will be considered for work with children and youth.
3. All employees of the Quarterly Meeting, and all youth and child-care workers who have regular supervisory roles, or who will have overnight responsibility for children, or who may be in a one-on-one counseling or mentoring relationship with minors at QM events will be given training in child sexual-abuse prevention. Training will be provided by the QM unless it has already been done and documented at the MM or YM level.
4. Specific procedures relating to the prevention of unsafe conditions for children, as outlined below, will be communicated and adhered to during QM events.
5. These policies and procedures will be modified and updated as needed. The Planning Committee will review suggested changes and make minor changes at its meetings. Those considered more substantial will be sent to the Monthly Meetings for review and presented at Quarterly Meeting in session for approval.

Procedures

The following procedures will be followed whenever possible at all QM events in order to ensure the safety of the children and youth under our care.

Prevention of abuse

1. There are to be at least 2 adults and a child or at least 3 children and an adult together at all times. If these numbers cannot be adhered to in a given situation, the door to the room where the children and workers are situated must be left open and the situation documented with the QM clerk or person responsible for the event.
2. Teenagers providing child-care should be supervised by an adult if at all possible, and the above numbers ratio adhered to.
3. Even with individuals not required to undergo sexual-abuse prevention training or background checks, such as occasional workers, care will be taken that anyone having contact with a child during a QM event is known to the QM or to the Monthly Meeting where the event takes place.
4. In situations where an adult providing child care is related to all the children under his/her care, adherence to the above restrictions concerning numbers and training is not required.

Responding to an allegation of abuse

If an allegation of sexual or physical abuse of a child or youth at a QM event is made, the following actions are to be taken in a prompt manner:

1. The person responsible for the event or the clerk of the Quarter will notify the parents, document the allegation, and report the incident to the legal authorities according to the laws of the state in which the incident occurs. For the sake of the child and the accused, the matter will be kept confidential.
2. The accused will be removed from all contact with children at QM events pending resolution of the charges. If the person is a member of a Monthly Meeting, the clerk of the Meeting will be notified of the charges.
3. A committee of care will be set up for the child or youth and his family, and another for the accused.
4. The insurance company will be notified.
5. The initial documentation, records of all further action, and a copy of the final investigative report will be kept in a confidential file. Sharing of the information in this file with others will be on a "need-to-know" basis as determined by the QM clerk and officers.
6. Concern for the spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being of all persons involved will govern all proceedings.

Implementation

For Quarterly Meeting sessions, the Coordinator, in conjunction with the host Meeting, will oversee implementation of these policies and procedures. For other events, the Coordinator and all adults involved in planning and executing the event will be responsible for implementation. The Planning Committee can, at its discretion, designate someone other than the Coordinator to oversee implementation. The clerk of Quarter or his/her designee is responsible for implementing the procedures for responding to an allegation of abuse. Implementation procedures will follow along these lines:

Quarterly Meeting Sessions

As part of planning for a Quarterly Meeting session where children will be present, the Coordinator or other designated person will work with a designated person from the host Meeting to determine which policies and procedures apply, and to make a plan to ensure their implementation. Implementation will usually involve checking to see that the adult-to-child number ratios are applied, that teenagers are adequately supervised, and that all persons involved with children are known to the host Meeting and/or the Quarterly Meeting.

Other Events

The Coordinator or other designated person will work with all adults involved in the event to see that policies and procedures are implemented. For persons who have regular supervisory roles at ongoing events, or who will have overnight responsibility for children, or who may be in a one-on-one counseling or mentoring relationship with minors at QM events, this will mean checking to see that reference and criminal background checks have been done and documented and training in child sexual-abuse prevention has been given. If these have not been completed, the Coordinator or designated person will see that they are before the event takes place. When the event is in progress, all adults present and in positions of responsibility will see that all policies and procedures are followed, including adult-to-child ratios, supervision of teenage child-care providers, and giving only persons known to the Quarter or Monthly Meetings responsibility for children.

Allegations of Abuse

The clerk of Quarter or his/her designee will be responsible for implementing the procedures for responding to an allegation of abuse as outlined above.

*Adopted by Concord Quarterly Meeting in session at West Chester Monthly Meeting on April 22, 2007.
Amended August 5, 2007.*

Protecting Children from Sexual Abuse

Concord Quarterly Meeting is working to ensure that our children are safe when in our care by implementing a Child-Safety Policy for our gatherings. However, we realize that education about child-sexual abuse is equally important for keeping our children safe. We encourage parents to talk with their children about proper and improper touch and about appropriate boundaries. We encourage parents to tell their children that, should something uncomfortable happen, they can come to a trusted adult and they will be believed and protected. We encourage parents to be involved in their children's activities and to know their friends, and to teach them Internet safety. The following is taken from the website of *Darkness to Light*, a non-profit dedicated to education about and prevention of child-sexual abuse:

Talk openly with your child.

Good communication may decrease a child's vulnerability to sexual abuse and increase the likelihood that the child will tell you if abuse has occurred.

- Teach your children about their bodies, about what abuse is, and, when age-appropriate, about sex. Teach them words that will help them discuss sex comfortably with you.
- Model caring for your own body, and teach children how to care for theirs.
- Teach children that it is "against the rules" for adults to act in a sexual way with them, and use examples. Teach them what parts of their bodies others should not touch.
- Be sure to mention that the abuser might be an adult friend, family member, or older youth.
- Teach children not to give out their e-mail addresses, home addresses, or phone numbers while using the Internet.
- Start early and talk often. Use everyday opportunities to talk about sexual abuse.
- Be proactive. If a child seems uncomfortable, or is resistant to being with a particular adult, ask why.

Learn the signs.

- Physical signs of sexual abuse are not common, although redness, rashes or swelling in the genital area, urinary tract infections, or other such symptoms should be carefully investigated. Also, physical problems associated with anxiety, such as chronic stomach pain or headaches, may occur.
- Emotional or behavioral signals are more common. These can run from "too perfect" behavior, to withdrawal and depression, to unexplained anger and rebellion.
- Sexual behavior and language that are not age-appropriate can be a red flag.
- Be aware that in some children there are no signs whatsoever.

More information can be found on these websites: www.darknesstolight.org; www.stopitnow.org; www.apa.org