

Friends Meeting of Austin

Practices and Policy for the Protection of Children and Youth

Introduction

In the advice on Equality in our *Faith and Practice*, we are reminded that “people everywhere are children of God and members of one family. We value the worth of each person. We cannot be easy in our own lives when others suffer indignity, injustice, or want. In the Spirit of Christ, we are ready to put ourselves at one another's side and share each other's burdens. As we are true to the Divine within ourselves, we respond to the Divine in others.”¹

In our discernment of our duties to assure the safety of children, we have learned that a prevalent form of injustice and inequality in our world is abuse of children, which is made possible by the imbalance of power between child and others. Child abuse can take several forms: physical, sexual, psychological, and neglect. It is disturbingly widespread: we note for example that one in four women and one in six men report having experienced sexual abuse before reaching the age of eighteen.² And surprisingly, 59 percent of sexual abusers of children are not strangers, but friends or family members of the child who have exploited a trusting relationship. In recent years we have learned of many cases of abuse of children while in the care of religious communities, and are mindful that no human community can assume that it is immune to this problem.³

A query posed in our *Faith and Practice* following the Equality advice asks of us: “In all our relations with others, are we sensitive to the issues of equality, autonomy, and power? How do we challenge destructive patterns in these relationships when they arise?” Following consideration of this advice and query, and in light of the prevalence of abuse of children in our society and in religious organizations, we have adopted these *Practices for Safe Engagement with Children and Youth* to model behavior to ensure the safety of children and youth which apply to everyone while on Meeting property or at Meeting sponsored events, and this *Policy for Safeguarding Children and Youth* which applies to individuals caring for children and youth in Meeting sponsored activities.

We adopt these with a prayer that they will prevent abuse of children while in the care of Friends Meeting of Austin, that by raising awareness of the issue it will make it less likely that children will suffer abuse, and that it will serve as a testimony to all faith communities of the need to take action to bring an end to the abuse of children in our society.

¹ North Pacific Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends. *Faith and Practice*, p. 46.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2006). *Adverse Childhood Experiences Study: Major Findings*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Available from: www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/ace/findings.htm.

³ Snyder, H. N. (2000). *Sexual assault of young children as reported to law enforcement: Victim, incident, and offender characteristics*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Available from: <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/saycrle.pdf>.

Friends Meeting of Austin Practices for Safe Engagement with Children and Youth

Friends Meeting of Austin is committed to maintaining a positive, nurturing environment that safeguards children and youth and protects all parties from misunderstandings. When creating safe boundaries, it is important to establish what types of interactions are appropriate and inappropriate in order to prevent interactions that:

- may be inherently harmful to children or youth,
- are the type used by child molesters to groom children or youth,
- may create the conditions where abuse can occur more easily, or
- may place adults at risk of wrongful accusation of abuse or neglect.

Friends observe the following practices when interacting with children and youth *under the care of the Meeting*. These practices are not designed or intended to address interactions within families.

All italicized terms are defined in Appendix A.

A. Basic Safety

1. Friends keep the Meeting house a physically safe environment for children and youth by continuously monitoring potential physical hazards and addressing those hazards or requesting appropriate committees such as First Day School or House & Grounds to address them.
2. Parents and guardians must maintain responsibility for supervising their child or youth prior to their joining such activities and after they have been released from them.
3. The Meeting is blessed with a large and active community which provides many opportunities for families and their children and youth to participate. The Meeting cannot practically enforce policies intended to safeguard children and youth at events which are not Meeting sponsored activities or services for children or youth. Parents and guardians are required to ascertain whether particular events are Meeting sponsored activities or services for children and youth, and if they are not, recognize that the parent is responsible for ensuring their child's or youth's safety.
4. Child care at Meeting sponsored events will comply with the Policy for Safeguarding Children and Youth.

B. Non-Discrimination

1. Friends respond to children and youth with respect, consideration and equal treatment, regardless of sex, race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, culture or socio-economic status.

C. Affection

1. Friends recognize the following types of positive and appropriate affectionate interactions with children and youth:
 - verbal praise;
 - handshakes, "high-fives," fist bumps, and hand slapping;
 - brief hugs (where contact is only at shoulder level and above);
 - pats on the shoulder or back;
 - pats on the head if culturally appropriate;
 - touching the hands, faces, shoulders, and arms;
 - arms around shoulders;
 - holding hands during prayer;

- holding hands while walking with small children;
 - sitting beside small children; and
 - kneeling or bending down for hugs with small children
2. Friends do not engage in negative and inappropriate forms of affection with children and youth including:
- inappropriate or lengthy embraces;
 - kisses on the mouth;
 - touching bottoms, chests, or genital areas other than for appropriate diapering or toileting of infants and toddlers;
 - showing affection in isolated areas such as bedrooms, closets, staff-only areas, or other private rooms;
 - occupying a bed with a child or youth;
 - any form of unwanted affection;
 - comments or compliments (whether spoken, written, or electronic) that relate to physique or physical developments (e.g., “You sure are developing,” “You really look good in those jeans”);
 - snapping bras, giving wedgies, or similar touching of underwear, whether or not it is covered by clothing; and
 - isolating the child from group activity without parental permission.

D. Sexuality

1. Friends conduct one-to-one counseling with children or youth in an open or public or other place where private conversations are possible but occur in full view of others.
2. Friends do not have sexual contact with a child or youth.
3. Friends do not date or become romantically involved with a child or youth.
4. Friends do not possess sexually oriented materials (magazines, cards, videos, films, clothing etc.) on Meeting property or in the presence of children or youth under the care of the Meeting except as expressly permitted as part of a pre-authorized educational program.
5. Friends do not use the Internet to view or download any sexually oriented materials on Meeting property or in the presence of children or youth under the care of the Meeting.
6. Friends do not discuss their own sexual activities, including dreams and fantasies, or discuss their use of sexually oriented or explicit materials such as pornography, videos or materials on or from the Internet, with children or youth.
7. Friends do not sleep in the same beds, sleeping bags, tents, hotel rooms or other rooms with children or youth unless the adult is an immediate family member of all children or youth in the bed, sleeping bag, tent, hotel room or other room. It is acceptable to have multiple adults sleep with all the children or youth participating in one open space such as a camp lodge.
8. Friends do not dress, undress, bathe, or shower in the presence of children or youth.

E. Discipline and Punishment

1. Friends do not use physical punishment in any way for behavior management of children and youth. No form of physical discipline is acceptable. This prohibition includes spanking, slapping, pinching, hitting, or any other physical force or restraint. Physical force or restraint may only be used to stop a behavior that may cause immediate harm to the individual or others.
2. Friends do not use harsh language, degrading punishment, or mechanical restraint such as rope or tape for behavior management.
3. Friends do not participate in or allow others to conduct any hazing activities relating to children’s or youth ministry or camp activities.

F. Alcohol and Drugs

1. Friends do not use, possess, distribute, or arrive under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs, or misuse legal drugs, while participating in or assisting with programs or activities specifically for children or youth.

G. Addressing Inappropriate Interactions

1. If Friends observe actions that are contrary to these practices, they address the actor in a Friendly but direct and immediate manner to address the issue to ensure the safety of the child or youth.
2. If addressing the actor does not correct the behavior, Friends also engage the Clerk of First Day School or the Clerk of Oversight to address the issue to ensure the safety of the child or youth.
3. If the action is performed by *Meeting Personnel* upon a child or youth under their care, Friends also immediately report the action to the Clerk of First Day School, or the Clerk of Oversight if the issue cannot be reported to the Clerk of First Day School.
4. Upon learning of actions contrary to these practices, First Day School or Oversight will take immediate steps to engage those involved in a Friendly manner to ensure the safety of the child or youth and protect all parties from misunderstanding.

H. Reporting Suspected Abuse of Children or Youth

1. The State of Texas requires that individuals report known or suspected *abuse or neglect* of children or youth to State authorities. If the abuse or neglect occurred within the State of Texas it can be reported to the Texas Child Abuse Hotline at 800-252-5400 or to local law enforcement. Another reporting option is the National Child Abuse Hotline is 800-4-A-CHILD (800-422-4453).
2. Friends will report known or suspected abuse or neglect of children or youth occurring on Meeting property or at meeting sponsored events to state authorities as required by state law, and to the Clerks of First Day School and Oversight.
3. Upon learning of suspected abuse or neglect of children or youth under the care of the Meeting, Friends Meeting of Austin will take immediate steps to ensure the safety of alleged victims, and will cooperate with any investigation by civil authorities to the fullest extent appropriate. A Response Committee comprised of the Presiding Clerk, the Clerk of First Day School Committee, the Clerk of Oversight Committee, and a Trustee will be responsible for all affairs related to the allegation of abuse.

Friends Meeting of Austin Policy for Safeguarding Children and Youth

Friends Meeting of Austin is committed to maintaining a positive, nurturing environment that safeguards children and youth and protects all parties from misunderstandings.

This policy is intended to reduce the risk of abuse or neglect of children and youth *under care of the Meeting*. It applies to any and all *Meeting Personnel* who *Regularly Work With Children or Youth* while they are *under care of the Meeting*.

All italicized terms are defined in Appendix A.

A. Screening and Selection

1. No *volunteer* will be allowed to be a person who *Regularly Works With Children or Youth* until the volunteer has been known to the congregation for at least six months.
2. Any and all *Meeting Personnel* who *Regularly Work With Children or Youth* shall be screened and selected utilizing, at a minimum, the following:
 - a. A standard application completed by the applicant that includes an authorization to conduct background checks and includes an acknowledgment that the applicant has received, read, and agrees to comply with this policy.
 - b. Driving or Motor Vehicle records check if the person may be transporting children or youth.
 - c. A criminal background check in any state where the applicant has resided during the past seven (7) years. Criminal background check results must be reviewed by the clerk of First Day School Committee. Offenses of a sexual, abusive or violent nature disqualify candidates from service, but no other categories of violations will have bearing on the candidate's qualification. If a potential issue is indicated in the background check result, the clerk of First Day School will consult with the clerk of Oversight to make a determination whether the offense disqualifies the candidate. The clerks of First Day School and Oversight must keep the background check results confidential, and may only indicate to the First Day School committee that an individual is disqualified based on the results of the background check without revealing details of the offense.
3. First Day School committee may, at any time and at its sole discretion, disqualify any applicant from work with children or youth. Applicants may request a committee to review this decision, convened by the Oversight Committee and consisting, at a minimum, of the clerk of First Day School and at least two other members of the First Day School committee, and clerked by the clerk of the Oversight Committee. Applicants must agree that background checks and any other information used by First Day School in determining his or her eligibility be disclosed to all members of this committee. This committee helps the applicant and committee members discern whether the applicant is qualified to work with children or youth, and reports its findings to the First Day Committee.
4. First Day School committee must maintain confidential personnel files containing the following records. Access to these files must be restricted to the Clerk of First Day School committee.
 - a. Copies of all applications submitted, including record of the committee's decision to accept or reject applicants.
 - b. Records documenting completion of required education and training programs.
 - c. Records of complaints received regarding violations of this policy and actions taken to address those complaints.
 - d. Criminal background checks will not be kept as part of the permanent file and will be destroyed following review.

B. Education and Training Requirements

1. Child abuse prevention education and training is required for all meeting personnel *who regularly work with children or youth* before they start their work with children or youth. First Day School will select appropriate training material and methods and ensure completion of required training.

C. Monitoring and Supervision of Programs

1. Programs for infants and children six years old or younger will have procedures to ensure that children are released only to their parents or legal guardians or those designated by them.
2. Every program for children and youth must have established ratios for adults and children and must attempt to comply with those established ratios, particularly for activities that occur off local meeting premises.
3. At a minimum, two *unrelated adults* are to be assigned to work together with or to supervise one another when working with children or youth.
4. Friends are prohibited from being alone with a child or youth or multiple children or youth where other adults cannot easily observe them.
5. At on-site meeting sponsored events, at least one care provider must be at least 18 years of age and at least three years older than the oldest child being supervised.
6. At off-site meeting sponsored events, at least one care provider must be at least 21 years of age.
7. An up to date list of approved congregation-sponsored programs for children and youth will be maintained by First Day School Committee.
8. Friends developing new activities must conduct a risk assessment of the activity and receive approval from the First Day School Committee.
9. Each program will develop age-appropriate procedures to ensure the safety of children and youth using restrooms and showers or baths.
10. When supervising or assisting private activities such as dressing, showering or diapering infants or children, Friends will remain in an area observable by other adults or work in pairs (as defined above).
11. No activities with children and youth may occur in areas with locked doors. If doors are closed, the room must have windows so activities within the room can be easily visually monitored.
12. When both boys and girls are participating in an overnight activity, male and female adults must be present.
13. Parents or guardians must complete written permission forms before Friends transport children and youth for a meeting sponsored activity.

D. Modeling of Practices and Enforcement of Policies

1. While working with children and youth under the care of the Meeting, any and all meeting personnel agree to:
 - a. model the Meeting's Practices for Safe Engagement with Children and Youth, and
 - b. enforce the Meeting's Policy for Safeguarding Children and Youth.
2. Failure to do so could result in prohibition of future service with children and youth.

APPENDIX A: Definitions

A. Children and youth

1. A **child** is defined as anyone under the age of 12 years.
2. A **youth** is defined as anyone who is at least 12 years old, but not yet 18 years old. A youth may also be an individual who is 18 years old or older, but still in high school.

B. Immediate Family Members and Unrelated Adults

1. An **immediate family member** is defined as spouse, partner, child, parent, sister, brother, similar in-law relationship, stepchild, stepparent, step-sibling, grandparent, or co-habitant.
2. An **unrelated adult** is defined as a person who is not an **immediate family member**.

C. Meeting Personnel

For the purposes of this policy, the following are included in the definition of **Meeting Personnel** when they are functioning in their respective roles for the Meeting:

1. All paid personnel whether employed in areas of ministry or other kinds of services by Friends Meeting of Austin.
2. Those who contract their services to Friends Meeting of Austin and its faith communities.
3. All volunteers. Volunteers consist of any unpaid person who enters into or offers him or herself for a meeting-related activity, or who actually assists with or performs a service or activity, whether or not he or she has been selected or assigned to do so.

D. Under Care of the Meeting

1. A **child** or **youth** is considered **under care of the Meeting** while he or she is signed in to participate in Meeting sponsored activities or services for children or youth, either on site at Friends Meeting of Austin facilities or off-site, until he or she is returned to the parent or guardian. Parents and guardians must maintain responsibility for supervision their child or youth prior to signing them into such activities and after their child or youth has been returned to them.
2. The Meeting cannot practically enforce policies intended to safeguard children and youth at events which are not Meeting sponsored activities or services for children or youth. Parents and guardians are required to ascertain whether particular events are Meeting sponsored activities or services for children and youth, and should ensure their child or youth is signed in to be supervised by **meeting personnel** who are certified by First Day School to **regularly work with children and youth**.

E. Regularly Work With Children or Youth

1. All Meeting/First Day School teachers and childcare providers.
2. All persons who supervise or assist with supervising children or youth in Meeting sponsored ministries, programs or activities more often than three times per year.
3. All persons who provide transportation to children or youth to/from Meeting sponsored activities more often than three times per year.
4. Any paid personnel whose living quarters are on the grounds of the meeting.

Examples of **Meeting Personnel** who **Regularly Work With Children or Youth** include, but are not limited to:

- Lead First Day School teachers

- Assistant First Day School teachers or other volunteers who assist teaching or providing childcare at Meeting sponsored events more often than three times per year
- All Friends who work or assist in the garden house more than three times per year
- All staff, whether volunteer or paid, at meeting camps
- Adults who participate in overnight activities with children or youth more than twice a year

F. Abuse of a child or youth includes the following acts or omissions by a person:

1. mental or emotional injury to a child or youth that results in an observable and material impairment in the child or youth's growth, development, or psychological functioning
2. causing or permitting the child or youth to be in a situation in which the child or youth sustains a mental or emotional injury that results in an observable and material impairment in the child or youth's growth, development, or psychological functioning;
3. physical injury that results in substantial harm to the child or youth, or the genuine threat of substantial harm from physical injury to the child or youth, including an injury that is at variance with the history or explanation given and excluding an accident or reasonable discipline by a parent, guardian, or managing or possessory conservator that does not expose the child or youth to a substantial risk of harm;
4. failure to make a reasonable effort to prevent an action by another person that results in physical injury that results in substantial harm to the child or youth;
5. sexual conduct harmful to a child or youth's mental, emotional, or physical welfare, including conduct that constitutes the offenses of indecency with a child, sexual assault, or aggravated sexual assault under the Texas Penal Code;
6. failure to make a reasonable effort to prevent sexual conduct harmful to a child or youth; compelling or encouraging the child or youth to engage in sexual conduct;
7. causing, permitting, encouraging, engaging in, or allowing the photographing, filming, or depicting of the child or youth if the person knew or should have known that the resulting photograph, film, or depiction of the child or youth is obscene or pornographic;
8. the current use by a person of a controlled substance in a manner or to the extent that the use results in physical, mental, or emotional injury to a child or youth;
9. causing, expressly permitting, or encouraging a child or youth to use a controlled substance; or
10. causing, permitting, encouraging, engaging in, or allowing a sexual performance by a child or youth.

G. Neglect of a child or youth includes:

1. the leaving of a child or youth in a situation where the child or youth would be exposed to a substantial risk of physical or mental harm, without arranging for necessary care for the child or youth, and the demonstration of an intent not to return by a parent, guardian, or managing or possessory conservator of the child or youth;
2. the following acts or omissions by a person:
 - a. placing a child or youth in or failing to remove a child or youth from a situation that a reasonable person would realize requires judgment or actions beyond the child or youth 's level of maturity, physical condition, or mental abilities and that results in bodily injury or a substantial risk of immediate harm to the child or youth;
 - b. failing to seek, obtain, or follow through with medical care for a child or youth, with the failure resulting in or presenting a substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or bodily injury or with the failure resulting in an observable and material impairment to the growth, development, or functioning of the child or youth;

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- c. the failure to provide a child or youth with food, clothing, or shelter necessary to sustain the life or health of the child or youth, excluding failure caused primarily by financial inability unless relief services had been offered and refused;
- d. placing a child in or failing to remove the child or youth from a situation in which the child or youth would be exposed to a substantial risk of sexual conduct harmful to the child or youth.

APPENDIX B:
Friends Meeting of Austin
CONFIDENTIAL NOTICE OF CONCERN

Individual(s) of Concern: _____

Date of occurrence: _____

Time of occurrence: _____

Type of Concern:

_____ Inappropriate behavior with a child or youth

_____ Policy violation with a child or youth

_____ Possible risk of abuse

Other concern: _____

Describe the situation: What happened, where it happened, when it happened, who was involved, who was present, who was notified? If reported to the State, what was their recommendation about investigating? *Attach additional sheets if needed.*

Has this situation ever occurred previously? *Attach additional sheets if needed.*

Submitted by: *(Please print)* _____

Telephone number: _____

Location and address: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Action taken:

Reviewed by: _____

