



A Recipe for
Running a Middle School Friends Overnight
for your Meeting or Quarter

By Jennifer Galloway
with the Middle School Friends
Subcommittee of the
Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's
Religious Education Committee
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WILD THINGS

A Recipe for Running a Middle School Friends Overnight for your Meeting or Quarter

RECIPE:

Middle School Friends are special. They have been raised in Meeting communities, with a great potential for strength and lovingness. They are developing stronger consciences, and stronger ties to their peers. Their spiritual awareness is growing and expanding, and they care a lot about other people. They can also be selfish and exclusive, and due to a need to belong, they can create social cliques. They love having fun and doing their own thing, and they also appreciate structure. They are beginning the struggles that are common among adults, and since those struggles are new to them, it can be a time of confusion. Relationships with parents can become tense as middle schoolers strive to differentiate themselves from their families, and yet middle schoolers long for real and meaningful contact with older folks. It is a time of change, tension, excitement, and growth.

MENU:

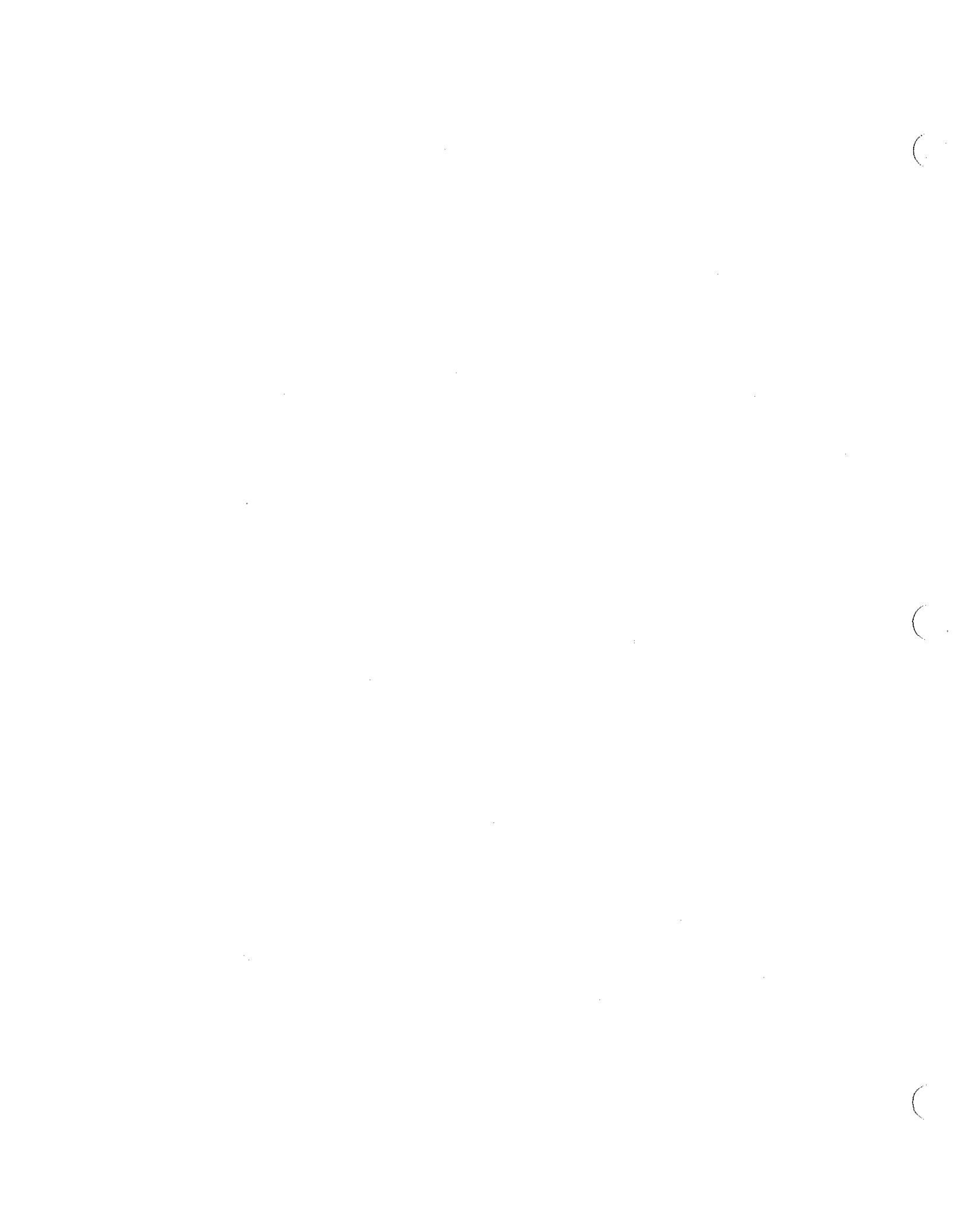
This publication is about organizing a small overnight gathering (Saturday evening through Meeting for Worship on Sunday) for Middle School Friends, and is intended for use by a small group of Monthly or-Quarterly Meeting members.

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DIRECTIONS:

- 1) Read through the guide, especially Cheryl Mitchell's article and the "Comments and Insights" which follow.
- 2) Check to be sure your Meeting has insurance to cover such gatherings.
- 3) Ask for help from folks in your Meeting and/or from the Middle School Friends Program Coordinator & Subcommittee of the Religious Education Committee of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.
- 4) Follow the steps for planning and running an overnight for a small group of Quaker kids.



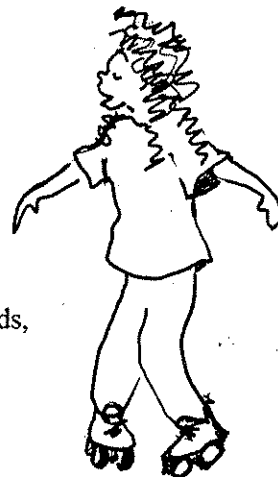
The following article, written in 1994 by Cheryl Mitchell of Middlebury Monthly Meeting, is from the New England Yearly Meeting Christian Education Newsletter, of March, 1996. It is excerpted with permission of Christel Jorgenson, Youth and Education Secretary, New England Yearly Meeting, 22 Sacramento Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138-1813. (617) 876-5263. Our comments on footnoted sections of this article are printed on page four.

"A Quaker Kids Group"

For the past eight years a small group of young Friends and friends have been gathering monthly at our home for a weekend overnight program. When we first met, they ranged in age from kindergarten to fourth grade. Now most are in junior high or high school. Group size has varied from five to fifteen, with eight being average. Some have parents who regularly attend meeting, some joined while their parents were seekers, some came out of curiosity or friendship. What seems most important to all of us is being part of a loving, supportive community; having a safe place to talk about ideas and concerns; and a more or less regular rhythm that is comfortable, fun, and flexible. A few of the things we learned over the years:

Saturday night:

- 5:00 Gather, play active games, out of doors if possible.
- 5:30 Begin preparing dinner
- 6:00 Dinner and conversation
- 7:00 Cleanup
- 7:30 Meditation and relaxation
- 8:00 Program
- 9:00 Worship sharing
- 9:30 Get ready for bed
- 10:00 Singing and tuckins (in the early years, I went to bed after the kids, now it's quite the reverse¹)



Sunday morning:

- 7:00 Salutation to the Sun, or other yoga exercises
- 7:30 Breakfast
- 8:00 Hike up the back cliff²
- 9:30 Pack up and leave to join our parents at Meeting³

Food: *the preparation is the project.*

It is important to have an adequate supply of sharp knives, cutting boards, and fruits or vegetables needing to be reduced to smaller pieces. This most popular part of food preparation was closely followed by grating things, kneading and shaping dough, and dealing with boiling oil. We enjoyed trying recipes from other countries (usually connected with the evening program); things that could be made in individual portions with a personal flair, such as pizza; and ice cream in large quantities. The all time favorite is tempura which requires knives, chopsticks, boiling oil, a prolonged eating experience, and a tablecloth made of newspapers.

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Thoughts on cleanup

When we were younger, this was a grueling but important experience since many of the kids didn't wash dishes at home. We all did our own place settings and selected a portion of the group chores. It does get easier as we get older. In fact, I often now save part of the cleanup for later in the evening, to be close to where the kids are talking, and available for comment, but no longer guiding the discussion.

Thoughts on program⁴

For me it was easier to have a yearly theme than to come up with a topic monthly. Some of the ones that worked best for us were:

- Quaker testimonies
- Quaker personages, historical
- Quaker personages, from our Meeting
- World religions
- Quaker practice
- Varieties of spiritual practice



We used materials from first day school curriculum packages as well as many other resource books. Programs that included hands-on activities or dramatizations were most popular when we were young, those that provoked discussion of ethical and speculative issues more important later. The year members of the meeting took turns providing a program based on their own spiritual journey and current work and thought was especially rich for all of us.

Highlight experiences: Probably the unplanned times we spent together are those that most created our growing sense of a group with history and personal and spiritual connections: sleeping in the hay barn, midnight walks to the river, delivering lambs and feeding bottle babies, thrilling toboggan runs under the stars, silent hikes where we could hear the music of underground springs, listening to and caring for one another through difficult personal experiences.

For me, as an adult, it provides a chance to hang out with exciting, thoughtful kids; a chance to explore ideas, religions, Quaker history and practice; a guilt-free way of participating in the First Day School program without having to miss Meeting; a chance to know my children's friends as unique individuals; and a reality check on "typical" adolescent life when my daily work with teen parents and their babies makes childhood seem exceedingly hard. As we grew up together, the kids took on more and more of the responsibility for the overnights and I came to look forward to these gatherings as a time of rejuvenation and reconnection with the vital energy and tremendous compassion of children and teenagers.

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COMMENTS AND INSIGHTS

by Jennifer Galloway and the Middle School Friends Subcommittee

1. At PYM Middle School Friends gatherings, which are much larger, there is a bedtime for the group, after which there is lights out, after which there is usually not a small amount of whispering and goofing around. But we do make sure that all the kids are in bed (at Burlington, in their own separate bunks), and feel much more secure when all the YFs are present and accounted for. We do not feel that it would be responsible, in the context of YFs, to allow the kids to stay up when the Friendly Adult Presences are asleep. It is the adults who are responsible for setting and enforcing safe limits. Good reasons to sleep are: it's respectful to the adults who are giving their time, & kids need sleep too! Everyone needs to sleep if you're going to be focussed in Meeting for Worship.
2. For those without back cliffs, be creative. Go for a walk in the woods, take a walk around the neighborhood, do jumping jacks, plan a night hike.
3. Abby Lederman, of Green Street Friends Meeting and the Middle School Friends Subcommittee, suggests doing a cooking project or making a snack to share with folks after Meeting for Worship. If you plan the overnight to occur at your meetinghouse, that will eliminate transportation on Sunday morning.
4. Saturday night programs-
In addition to annual Quaker themes suggested in Cheryl Mitchell's article:

Alternatives to Violence Project (introduction, community building)
baking
craft project
dance
diversity
games
gender- all girls' overnight or all boys' overnight
gifts
guided meditation
ice skating, roller skating
night hike
singing, music, and drumming
skits
storytelling
swimming
talent show
theater games, improvisation
video
worship sharing



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STEPS TO FOLLOW IN PLANNING

STEP ONE: Spend some time with the kids in your Meeting. Find out what themes and activities interest them. Plan with them, not for them.

STEP TWO: Find other people of all ages who want to work on this project with you, from high schoolers and young adult Friends, to older folks in your Meeting. Find out their interests and talents. Remember that the single most important predictor for whether someone gets involved in a volunteer project is that they are asked.

STEP THREE: Divide up tasks.

Here are some of the tasks which will need to be done before the gathering:

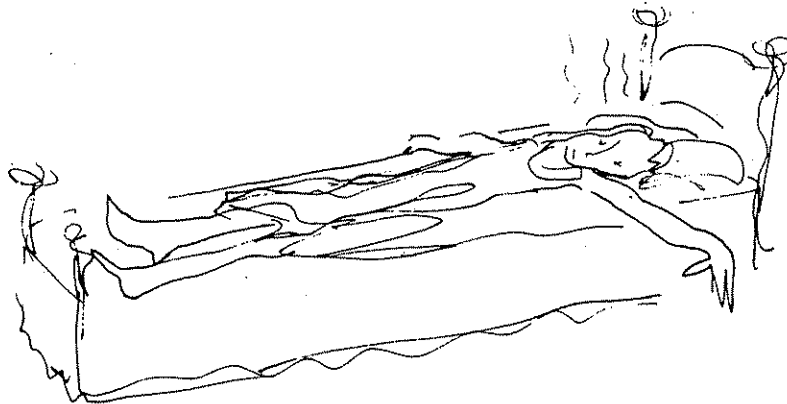
- Decide how many people of what age group can come
- Invite one adult for every five to seven middle schoolers
- Plan the schedule & program
- Publicize
- Plan meals and shop for food

Here are some of the tasks which will need to be done at the gathering:

- Organize work groups to do cooking and cleaning (suggestion: come up with a list of chores and have kids sign up for one or two each)
- Songleading
- Establishing and communicating guidelines
- Leading program and worship sharing
- Relaxing and having a good time

Here are the tasks for after the gathering:

- Evaluation
- Rest
- Future planning



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GUIDELINES THAT WORK!

The best way to set guidelines that work is to involve the young people in your group in the process, and to talk about the reasons and experiences behind the rules.

Sometimes it can be confusing to know how much authority you have with young folks at your Meeting. It will be good to spend some time talking with the parents of those involved to get a sense of what limits they think are appropriate.

When everyone has gathered at an event and introductions have been accomplished, then the moment is ripe for setting guidelines. By then, some guidelines (such as listening) might already have been broken! Solicit groundrules from the group by asking these questions: *What will help us to have a good time together? What will help participants feel safe while we are here?*

Some of the groundrules that are likely to come up are: no put downs, listen to whoever is doing the talking to the group, participate fully, respect each other, maintain confidentiality, no smoking. Once there has been a good discussion of basic rules, that is the time to slip in other rules necessary for the safety of the group: don't leave the site; respect others' property and the Meeting House property; don't leave the supervision of adults without letting them know where you'll be or asking an adult to come with you; sexual activity and the use of drugs is not permitted.

Friendly Presences are responsible for immediately interrupting dangerous behavior on the part of a Middle School Friend.

What to do in case of guidelines violations:

MINOR: Whispering on sidelines during group discussion

Response: Ask that the group stay focussed on the group process.

If it persists: Take child aside and discuss the disruption.

Separate kids who distract each other too much.



MEDIUM:

A. Running on the Meeting House balcony, which has been declared off-limits.

Response: Stop behavior, remind child of safety & remind group of rule.

B. Talking or rowdy behavior late at night...

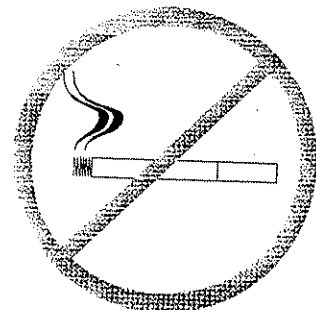
Response: Periodic reminders to quiet down are appropriate.

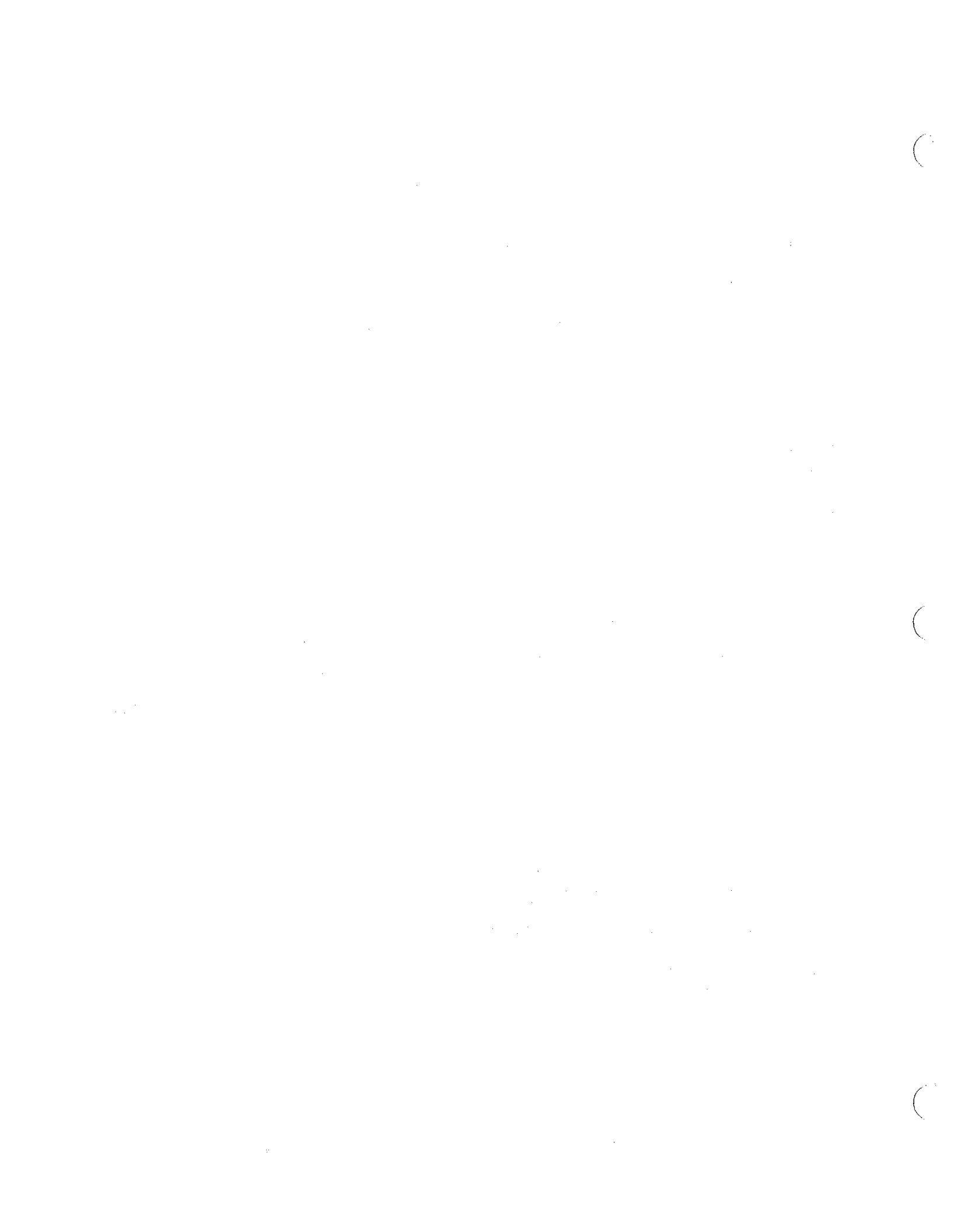
If it gets way too late, and you know that for you to be functional, you really need some rest, then it is time to start separating kids. It is important to be consistent. If you say, "I'm going to start separating you the next time I have to come over and quiet you down," then do it!

SERIOUS: Sneaking off and smoking

Response: Become an anti-tobacco activist.

Sit down and have a serious talk with the child involved, and let them know you'll be speaking with their parents. Speak with parents.





THE ROLE OF FRIENDLY PRESENCES: Young Friends, Young Adults and Adults

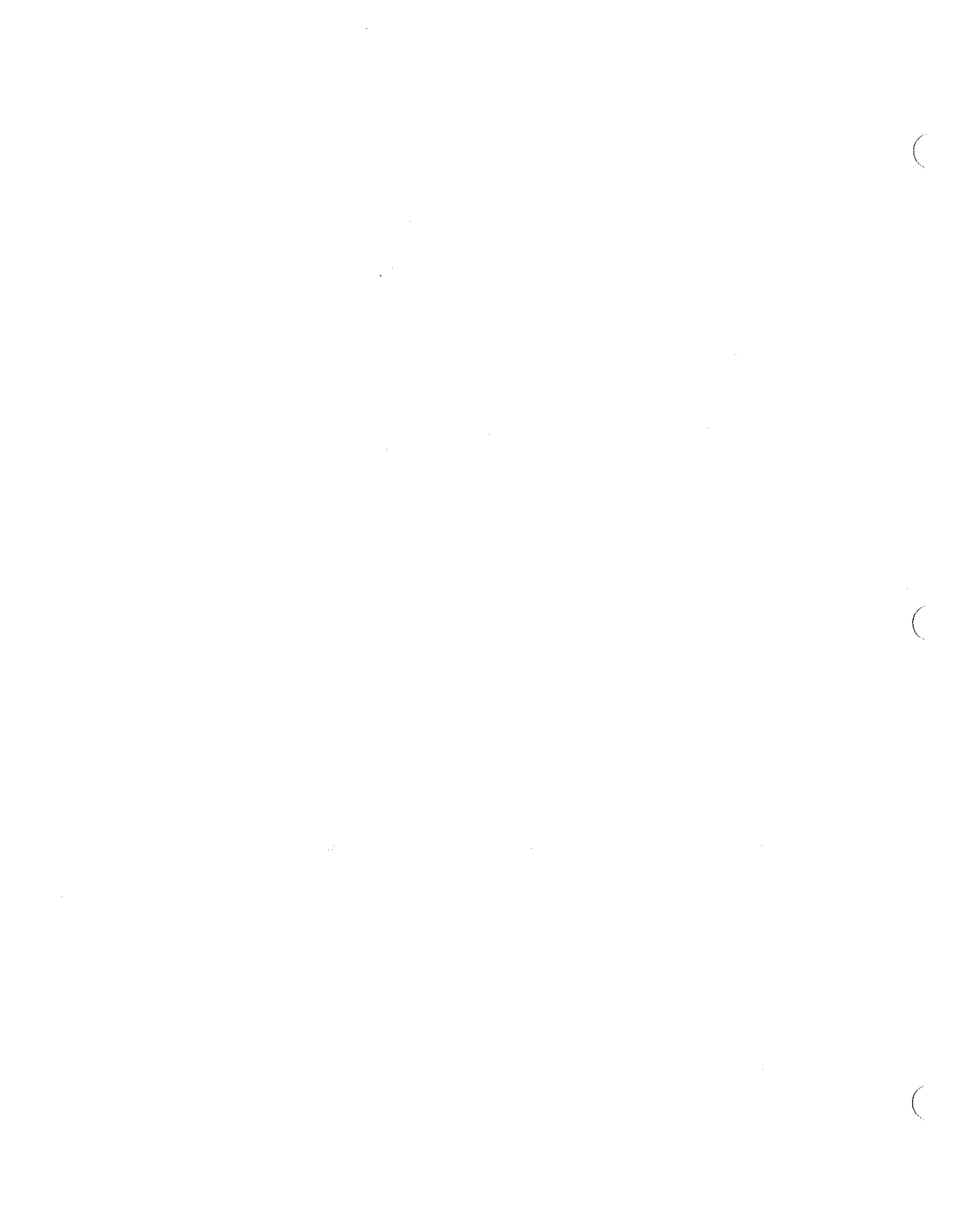
You may choose to include people of many ages in your get-togethers, either as participants or as volunteers. In either case, it is important for you to spend some time talking with them about their status as role models to the younger kids. Some Young Friends (YFs) - and some adult Friends - may need more guidance than others. Adult Friends also need to be aware of the special expertise of high schoolers in working with their own Quaker peers.

What all Friendly Presences need to know about working with younger kids:

- You are in a position of authority and responsibility.
- Younger kids will inevitably look up to you.
- If parents think that any sexual activity (especially between YFs and MSFs) is going on at gatherings, many will not allow their children to attend.
- As a Friendly Presence, it is your responsibility to reinforce the guidelines of the community and not to break them. Your example can provide a positive bridge to other parts of the Quaker community, including Young Friends gatherings and Meeting events, where the same guidelines exist.
- YF FPs should not be the solitary chaperones in any situation.
- If MSFs share information that is emotionally upsetting to them, let them know that you heard what they said and that you would be a willing listener if they want to talk more, but don't crowd them. Worship sharing may be the only safe space they have to talk about certain things, and the fact that they are able to talk about something difficult or emotional may be a sign or way of healing.
- If a MSF appears to be in crisis or shares information which makes you feel s/he might be suicidal, stay with him/her. If a YF Friendly Presence is faced with this situation, s/he should let an adult in charge know. Contact the child's parent(s) and make sure that they are aware of resources for counseling, including Quaker counselors (call 215-241-7068) through the Family Relations Committee of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. If you are in an emergency and unsure of what to do, call the local suicide hotline.

A note of reassurance:

The information on responses to suicidal young people, the upcoming section on child sexual abuse prevention, and the section on emergencies, are included to help you be prepared for the tough situations and issues that may come up in running youth gatherings. The better prepared and the more aware you are, the more able you will be to respond appropriately to difficult problems.



CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION

The Middle School Friends Subcommittee has developed a set of guidelines intended to prevent abuse and neglect, for those who work with youth in Meetings.

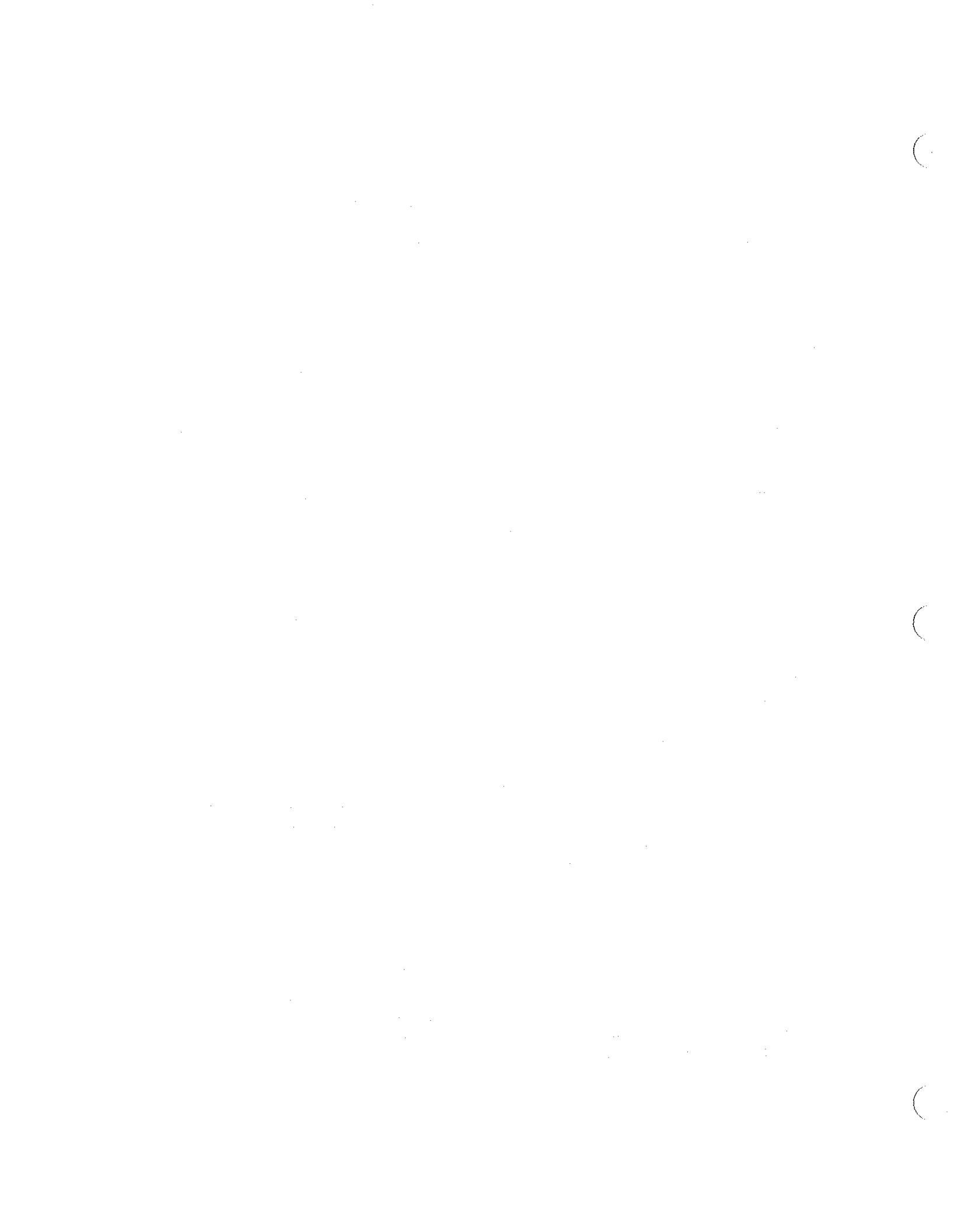
We seek both to protect children from harm and to teach them that their bodies are gifts of God; that they have the right to establish personal boundaries, to communicate about their boundaries in a world where others' may be different, and to express love and affection physically and verbally in ways that are appropriate for their age.

Here are some guidelines:

- 1) A child who is being reprimanded has the right to have at least two adults present. Generally, if a child is being spoken to alone by an adult, we expect that they will be within sight, but not necessarily within earshot, of other members of the community.
- 2) A Middle School Friend should not be alone in a room with an adult or a high school Young Friend.
- 3) Contact between adults and YF Friendly Presences and Middle School Friends outside the context of gatherings is not encouraged and must only occur with parental knowledge and permission.
- 4) All participants at an overnight have a right to set their physical boundaries and to say no to unwelcome touch. (Each one also has a responsibility not to engage in inappropriate sexual activity).
- 5) A child or Young Friend who feels that s/he has been sexually harrassed or abused, or subject to neglect at home, school, or at a Meeting, has a right to bring that complaint to any adult with whom s/he feels comfortable, and the right to have the complaint acknowledged and addressed by a committee of the Meeting responsible for such matters. It is the intent perceived by the child which legally counts most. If the committee feels that the complaint is valid, they are legally obligated to turn it over to the county child welfare agency. (Does your Meeting have a policy for preventing and addressing complaints of abuse or harrassment? Are the children educated about that policy? Are you aware of resources for counseling in your community should this issue come up in your Meeting?)
- 6) Adults who express a lot of affection towards young people need to be aware of how much their own needs are being met by their contact with middle or high schoolers. Those who believe that they can solve another person's problems may be concealing their own need to be a caretaker. Another more experienced, less personally involved, adult may be better able to meet the child's needs. Adult FPs must be mindful of the power that they have in relation to young people, and be careful to use their power in constructive ways.

Resources for addressing child abuse and sexual harrassment:

Talk to your Meeting Oversight Committee in advance to find out if your Meeting has policies and procedures to address these important issues. If not, request that your Meeting address this issue. For assistance, contact the Family Relations Committee or the Religious Education Committee of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (PYM). *Addressing Sexual Abuse in Friends Meetings*, a book published by New England Yearly Meeting, is available from the PYM Library. Check the list of "People you can call" printed on the last page of this curriculum.



WORSHIP SHARING WITH MIDDLE SCHOOL FRIENDS

Worship Sharing works best if it is introduced by an experienced high schooler or a person comfortable with expressing the deep pleasure that it can be and has been for them.

Here are the basic directions:

- Share names around the circle. Go over the following rules with the group.
- Start with a period of silent centering.
- Read the first question, and allow answers to come; or read all the questions, and allow people to share in response to whichever question(s) most speak to them.
- Allow silence during and after each contribution.
- Remember that no one is required to speak.
- Risk-taking enriches the group.
- Welcome each contribution as a gift and as equally valuable.
- Try to be aware of the needs of each person in your group. Listen deeply and with love to the person who is speaking.
- If someone cries, listen to them and let them finish. Don't smother them or try to cheer them up. The tears are not the pain, but the healing.
- To respect confidentiality, everything that is said stays within the group.
- Be serious but not somber. Too much laughter can make your group feel frivolous.
- Don't ask follow up questions- this is not a discussion group.
- End with a group hug, hand squeeze, or whatever else seems supportive and appropriate.

WORSHIP SHARING QUESTIONS FOR FRIENDLY ADULT PRESENCES

It is important that those who work with teenagers consider how ageism affects your connections with young people. The following queries, which can be used in worship sharing, can help you to reflect on your relationships with the middle schoolers (and high schoolers) in your Meeting.

- Do I love, acknowledge, and respect young people and let them know that?
- Do I blame young people for their mistakes or take out my frustrations on them?
- Do I share leadership with the young people in my Meeting, and help them work together and support each other?

- How do my memories of being a teenager affect my work with teenagers now?
- What were the most difficult and exciting things about life as a teen for me?
- What qualities did I respect in adults? Was there an adult who was particularly supportive of me?
- Do I find it difficult to talk with teenagers now? What might make it difficult for them to talk with me?
- What gifts do I have to share with young people?

Adults can think together about how your overnight programs and First Day School can best empower the young people in your Meeting. Be aware of what kinds of roles and responsibilities interest the teenagers in your Monthly Meeting. Involve them in planning for gatherings and the decision-making processes of the Meeting. Middle School Friends need to be getting the message that their voices, experiences, and ideas are an important part of the mix of your community.

For more information, read: *Men's Work: How to Stop the Violence that Tears Our Lives Apart* by Paul Kivel (Ballantine, 1992), pp. 240-242. (The above queries are adapted from Kivel's book).

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Emergencies:

You will need:

- 1) permission slips with medical information for each child and a parent's or guardian's signature.
 - 2) phone numbers where parents can be contacted.
 - 3) emergency phone numbers for local hospitals, police, fire departments, and the poison control center.
 - 4) directions to the nearest hospital.
 - 5) Before the event, find out whether your Meeting's insurance policy covers youth events.
- For copies of permission and medical forms, contact the Religious Education Committee Office at 215-241-7221 or 1-800-2200-PYM, ext. 7221.

Other Resources:

Working with Middle Schoolers: Ideas and Resources for Young Friends Groups and First-Day Teachers, prepared by Lynne Brick and Barbara Henderson, Revised in 1989 and 1992. Contains a wealth of suggestions for working with this age group. It is available from Friends General Conference Bookstore

Just Do It: How to Plan and Staff a Youth Gathering, by Ralph (Cookie) Caldwell and Margaret (Peg) Bernstein, of the Young Friends Subcommittee of Religious Education of PYM, September, 1990. Available from Friends General Conference.

New England Yearly Meeting's Guide to Planning a Youth Gathering, published by the Christian Education Committee of NEYM. Contact: Christel Jorgenson, Youth and Education Secretary, New England Yearly Meeting, 22 Sacramento Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138-1813. (617) 876-5263.

People you can call!:

For advice or a visit to your gathering...

- Religious Education Committee, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1515 Cherry Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102; (215) 241-7171.
- Family Relations Committee, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1515 Cherry Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102; (215) 241-7068.

For books...

- Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Library, 1515 Cherry Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102; (215) 241-7220.
- Friends General Conference (FGC), 1216 Arch Street, 2B, Philadelphia, PA 19107; (215) 561-1700; to order, phone 1-800-966-4556.

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