



**Philadelphia
Yearly Meeting**
of the Religious Society of Friends

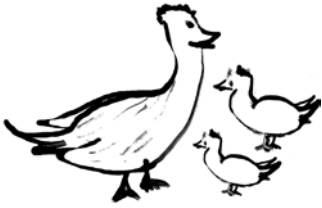
**BEST PRACTICES FOR CHILD
AND COMMUNITY SAFETY**
A Monthly Meeting Resource*
JANUARY 2024



*In this resource, the term “youth” refers to anyone under the age of 18

A Safe & Nurturing Community

To create and sustain safe, loving Meeting communities, we must nurture the spiritual lives and community of our young Friends. This nurturing requires the work, energy and deep dedication of many adults, both paid and volunteer. It also requires a safe environment.



Physically, spiritually, and emotionally, our young Friends must feel safe and be safe to grow in God's Light. There are many things that we do to create an environment of safety around our youth. For example, we can maintain confidentiality in worship sharing with both youth and adults; we can care for youth tenderly through conflicts with their peers; and we can have a high adult/youth ratio in our programs. We also take care that the adults who facilitate programs for youth will prioritize safety.

Why do we need policies and procedures to ensure child safety?

To live up to how deeply we care about the safety of the children and adults in our faith community and to protect one another by deterring abuse.

- In our Meetings, adults are companions to youth on their spiritual journeys. The adults may be parents, religious education program teachers, Friendly Presences, or simply allies to youth. Establishing policies and procedures provides a safe environment in the Meeting and models practices and behaviors that strengthen our members in their interactions with the world.
- Established policies, including but not limited to background checks, deter potential offenders from applying for volunteer or paid positions with youth, and show that our Meetings are committed to keeping youth safe. Maintaining communication, education, and awareness, and following sound practices such as those outlined in this booklet will minimize the risk of abuse of youth in our Meetings.
- It is vital to ensure that our Meetings are in compliance with state laws regarding child welfare.

NOTE: When youth in the Meeting turn 18, they do not immediately become peer-worthy adults. There probably is and always will be a significant power differential between an individual and the people who had authority over them in their youth. This power difference makes the process of establishing a relationship as peers ethically tricky. The Meeting should articulate clear boundaries and expectations for youth workers' interactions with those they formerly cared for, who are now "legally" adults.

Policies & Resources



The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (PYM) policy applies to all PYM paid staff and all persons who work in PYM sponsored programs with youth under 18, whether paid, compensated by work grants or fee waivers, or as volunteer “Friendly Presences” (FPs).

- The programs covered by the PYM policy include gatherings of PYM Young Friends (high school age), Middle Schools Friends, Children & Families Program, and other PYM sponsored events at the Quarterly and Yearly Meeting level (for example, Sessions).
- The policy includes rules to prevent unsafe situations and requires background checks and references for all youth program workers.

Monthly and Quarterly Meetings should develop and institute policies and practices for paid or volunteer youth religious education leaders, teachers, childcare providers, and others working directly with youth in the Meeting.

- The guidelines in this booklet are examples of sound safety practices.
- Each Meeting is different and will need to establish policies and procedures that work for the Meeting and that comply with the laws of the state.
- PYM staff, specifically PYM’s Youth Engagement Coordinator can visit a Meeting or Quarter to facilitate a workshop on safety policies and practices.

The yearly meeting provides tools and resources to help monthly and quarterly meetings follow safe practices including:

Background Checks

When requested by the Meeting or individual, PYM will conduct Criminal and Child Abuse background checks (except for FBI fingerprinting checks). We use Protect My Ministry (PMM), and background checks are kept on file by PYM for five years.

See full procedure on page 6 or visit:

pym.org/youth-programs/friends-who-care-for-youth/child-safety-forms

Safe Church Resources

The Yearly Meeting is a member of Safe Church and can provide Monthly Meetings with templates for recommended youth safety procedures and responses.

The 5 Elements of a Child Safety Policy

The following 5 elements outline essential steps of a sound youth safety policy. Meetings may contact PYM's Youth Engagement Coordinator or the Director of Program and Religious Life for more detailed examples. While each Meeting's policy may differ in detailed practice, a community safety policy that contains these five essential elements provides a sound base::



1 A plan to address the “Rule of 3”

The Rule of 3 ensures that one adult is not ever alone with one youth. If a youth is of school age or older, the ratio should be one adult with at least two youth, or two adults with one youth. If youth are preschool age or younger, then two adults should always be present. Small Meetings who do not have sufficient volunteers to consistently practice the rule of three should:

- Make sure that all adults who may at any time be alone with one youth have current, clear background checks, that are in alignment with state laws.
- Have other adults check in frequently and unpredictably.
- Ensure that adults and youth are never isolated behind closed doors.

NOTE: It is important to consider the needs of the children at a particular gathering. For example, if a child is non-speaking, having two adults present is suggested regardless of the age of the child.

2 Reference Checks

Conduct and document reference checks for all prospective youth and childcare workers. The recommended best practice is to collect three references, professional or from an adult who is familiar with the individual's work with youth. Keep written records of reference calls on file and in confidence.

3 Known to Community

Youth workers should be known by the Meeting community for at least six months prior to being given responsibility for youth. This helps provide for safety and also allows adults time to get to know the community before being tasked with these responsibilities.

4 Background Checks

All youth workers should consent, in writing, to criminal and child abuse background checks that comply with state laws. These checks should be complete before working with youth. PYM can conduct background checks (except for FBI fingerprinting checks) for Meetings, or Meetings can conduct them on their own using state websites. The procedure for ordering background checks through PYM is outlined on page 6.

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5 Training & Maintaining

Youth Safety Practices should be reviewed regularly and revised as needed by the Meeting. Policies and procedures should be explained to all youth workers before they have care of any youth, and they should be reviewed at least once a year with anyone in the Meeting having care of youth.

Getting Started in your Meeting



Establish an atmosphere of trust by discussing why and how the Meeting will implement youth safety policies and practices. Caring conversation sends a message to families and everyone else in the community that there is a commitment to their wellbeing and that the Meeting is a safe place to discuss difficult situations and topics.

Establish a written policy and procedures with the support of the whole Meeting. Drafts and revisions are recommended to come to the Meeting for business for review and approval.

The policy should include:

- The 5 Elements of a Youth Safety Policy.
- Orientation to the policy for new members and everyone who interacts with youth.
- Ongoing education for all Meeting childcare and youth workers.
- Plan for maintaining privacy of sensitive information collected for background checks or references. (If a Meeting asks PYM to do background checks with Protect My Ministry, the completed background checks are stored online.)
- A Communication & Action Plan in case the Meeting needs to respond to an allegation.
- A procedure for documenting who is holding care for the children on which dates (staff/volunteer calendar or log), as well as a way to document any incidents.

Review Spaces

- Hold all activities for youth in central, highly visible locations.
- Do not allow activities to take place in private rooms, offices, or isolated parts of a building.
- Keep all remote areas, such as closets and unoccupied rooms, locked.
- Have windows installed on doors where activities and Meetings take place, or leave doors open if there are no windows present.
- Be sure that first aid supplies are easily accessible and not out of date.
- Check other safety measures: for example, outlet covers and choking hazards in infant and toddler spaces, check on food allergies, etc.

Continued on page 6

Equity and Community

Most people would never endanger the youth in our Meetings. However, this is not a reason to dismiss safety practices. It is important to reassure volunteers that the practice of background checks is applied equally, no matter how well known a person may be. Not doing so may be considered discriminatory. It is important to perform background checks for everyone equally according to your policy. Friends will be reassured to know that their information is kept private.

Abuse prevention is only one step toward safety. Consider how to address the physical, emotional, and spiritual safety of youth in the Meeting as well. Care for youth is the responsibility and joy of the whole Meeting, not only a religious education committee. For example, how might a Property Committee, or Worship and Ministry Committee, help to support the physical and spiritual safety and care for young Friends?

Procedure for Background Checks



The Yearly Meeting can process background checks for Friends who are working in Monthly or Quarterly Meeting Youth Programs as we do for all those working in PYM sponsored youth programs. The checks are performed by authorized PYM staff using approved, confidential services that utilize appropriate national and statewide databases. All information is held in the strictest confidence and kept in secure files.

How to Conduct Background Checks through PYM

Instructions may be accessed on the PYM website:

pym.org/youth-programs/friends-who-care-for-youth/child-safety-forms

1. A Meeting contact person shares with the Youth Engagement Coordinator the names and e-mail addresses of individuals for whom the Meeting is requesting background checks.
2. Within a few days, each of those individuals will receive an e-mail with a link and instructions to fill out an online consent form.
3. Once the consent form is completed, the authorized PYM staff member will request the specific background checks needed, based on the state in which your Meeting is located.
4. Those applying for clearances for Pennsylvania Meetings will receive a second e-mail with a link and instructions for the PA Child Abuse Clearance.

5. Individuals who will be paid (in PA) and certain volunteers working directly with youth under 18 may also need to complete the FBI fingerprinting check. NOTE: PYM staff do not conduct the fingerprinting check but can provide the appropriate links and instructions in these instances.
 6. Once the appropriate background checks have been requested, PYM staff will notify the Meeting contact. It is the responsibility of the Meeting to follow-up with PYM staff on the status of the background checks.
 7. Meetings should contact references as described above.
 8. The process needs to be repeated every 60 months (at least once every five years). Laws differ from state to state. PYM can help you access state guidelines.
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Resources

Training

PYM's Youth Engagement Coordinator can visit a Meeting or Quarter to facilitate a workshop on safety policies and practices.

Response Plan in the Event of Alleged Abuse

The Meeting should have policies and procedures in place for a response in the case that an adult is suspected of abuse.

Mandated Reporting

The Meeting must report the incident to the legal authorities, according to the laws of the state in which the incident occurs. This link provides contact information for reporting agencies in each state:

www.childwelfare.gov/topics/safety-and-risk/mandated-reporting/

In Pennsylvania, to report suspected abuse, contact PA Childline –

www.dhs.pa.gov/KeepKidsSafe/Resources/Pages/ChildLine.aspx
1-800-932-0313

In Pennsylvania, free mandated reporter training is available from the PA Family Support Alliance (PAFSA):

pafsa.org/mandated-reporter-training

Contacts

For information and background checks, contact:

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