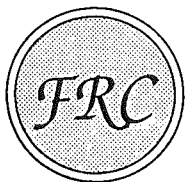


# PASTORAL CARE NEWSLETTER



PUBLISHED BY THE FAMILY RELATIONS COMMITTEE  
OF PHILADELPHIA YEARLY MEETING

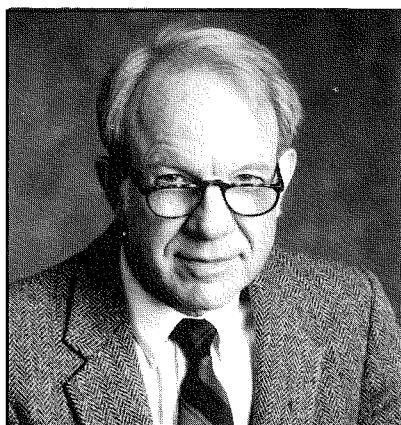
*For Overseers, Members of Ministry and Counsel, and others involved  
in pastoral care and counseling*

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## A Challenge to be Clear and Caring

by Lindley M. Winston



Lindley M. Winston

It is hard for us, at least for those of us in the older generation, to understand and come to terms with past blindness in regard to sexual violation of young people in schools, in homes and in religious communities. Until recently, such events have been hushed and hidden. The lives of the victims have been scarred and twisted. The perpetrators have in many cases gone on for years insinuating themselves into situations of opportunity.

The liberating days of the 60s can be given credit for making the community aware of the power differentials in our society which have made the less powerful subject, first, to being abused, and second, to being silenced or not believed. And the powerful have not been held responsible for their deeds. The focus of this

article is on how Overseers within our meetings safeguard our children, without losing spontaneity and openness in our relationships with children, as we honestly face the reality of abuses which can occur.

But are these not things which exist in our larger society, separate from us as Friends? Need Friends be concerned about sexual abuse and be concerned about the vulnerability of our young people? Sadly, yes. There have been disturbing revelations over the past several years in various yearly meetings, Friends schools and Friends organizations, and in honesty we need to acknowledge that for each situation we know of, there are still others which have not been revealed.

I believe we need to find open and authentic ways to manifest our caring for our young people, ensuring that they are as safe as we can make them from sexual abuse. We need to manifest caring also for the many adults who work tirelessly with the young people, recognizing the danger of innuendo to their reputations.

Thankfully, we are not dealing with large numbers of abuses, but for those in whose lives the abuses occur, the impact can be devastating. And for meetings which have this concern the challenge to community is significant. What is it which we, as Friends, need to learn?

## Facing the Problem

When we, as Overseers or members of Ministry and Counsel, acknowledge the need to address the issue of sexual abuse, the first question we face is: How ready are we to truly deal with it in our meeting? In our self? Undoubtedly for some in our meeting, it will be a subject which arouses deep feelings because of a personal experience of having been sexually abused or wrongfully accused of having mistreated another. For many of us, entertaining the possibility that this could happen in OUR meeting is repugnant. We know that we carry deep feelings within ourselves, yet we long to begin in a place of centeredness. It is too easy to go to the extreme either of denying that such danger exists and thus ignoring useful clues, or overreacting and becoming suspicious, for example, of any enthusiastic offer of a man in the meeting to work with young people. Sensing either extreme, whether in ourself or in our meeting community, should cause us to pause and be cautious, for we know we are not operating from a place of centeredness. Do we have the courage to acknowledge that this is a subject which does stir deep feelings, thus allowing Overseers to then address the next question: What support do we, as a meeting, need to move forward on this? Can we stop and reflect on how our basic beliefs as Friends can serve us in this quest?

## Nurturing a Healthy Atmosphere

Within our meetings it will usually be the parents of our First Day School children and the First Day School committees and teachers who will have been most sensitized to the risks of sexual abuse -- both to the risks of its occurrence and to the risks of innuendo and suspicion to which teachers may, in this present climate, be subject. What can Overseers offer in the way of leadership and support?

This newsletter is published quarterly by the Family Relations Committee of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Trish Walat, Clerk; Helene Pollock and Arlene Kelly, Co-editors. We are located at 1515 Cherry St., Philadelphia, PA 19102. Comments are welcome. **Please do not duplicate.** To obtain additional copies, contact Steve Gulick (215-241-7068).

Working together, Ministry and Counsel or Overseers and the First Day School Committee, could start by considering the whole topic of sexual abuse, giving thought to how that concern applies to the safety of the children and adolescents of the meeting. Undoubtedly, for the vast majority of meetings such a discussion would lead to a sense of confidence in how children are supported and cared for. Certainly a meeting should be pleased that it has a climate of trust and openness. A good next question then can be, How do we nurture that climate? How do we build on it to ensure its continuation in a manner consistent with our practices as Friends?

One approach to be considered is the formulation of screening procedures based on queries and advices developed by the meeting. These would be used in a clearness process with each prospective teacher. Orientation can be provided for teachers and youth workers, including a discussion of what is appropriate and what is not, and constructive ways to foster companionship and trust.

As we come to a place of being comfortable in discussing these things openly in our meeting, then both our children and teachers can be prepared to participate in their own protection: children from abuse wherever it may occur, adults from unwarranted suspicion. Teaching about sexual abuse may be part of the spiritual education of the meeting's children. Teachers may be encouraged to ask for a partner in assuming any responsibility for children when they feel any risk of vulnerability.

Each meeting, according to its size and its composition, needs to reflect on what would work best for it in dealing with the subject of safety for our children and support for the adults who work with young people.

## When Concerns Exist and/or Abuse Occurs

It is hard to imagine a more difficult challenge to the intention of Overseers to be both candid and caring than when the possibility of sexual abuse of a child or teenager becomes a distinct probability, or even worse, a reality in a meeting. For one meeting with which I am familiar, this concern was first raised in the Nominating Committee when a name was brought forward for First Day School teacher.

## Services Offered by the Family Relations Committee

The Family Relations Committee of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, and the Friends Counseling Service, which is under its care, provide a full range of services to assist meetings in carrying out pastoral care. Our address is 1515 Cherry Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102. Persons in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting may contact Steve Gulick at 215-241-7068 to schedule a workshop or a consultation with a Friend who is experienced in the particular issue. The Friends Counseling Service consists of experienced, trained counselors, all of whom are active Friends, whose spiritual lives are integral to their approach to counseling. Fees are adjusted according to the person's ability to pay. To contact a counselor in your area, call Deborah Cooper at 215-988-0140.

**Attention Overseers!** The Family Relations Committee is eager to hear your suggestions for our forthcoming Overseers gathering, which is now being planned. Tell us about the issues that concern you so that we can address them. We also sponsor **Couple Enrichment Retreats** for couples to get away together to affirm and renew their relationship. The next weekend retreat is scheduled for October 4-6, 1996, in Cape May, NJ. Call Brad Sheeks and Pat McBee (215-349-6959) to register. Brad and Pat will be taking a leave from this ministry for most of 1997. Other leaders will be continuing the work. For more information, contact Steve Gulick.



### PENDLE HILL

A QUAKER CENTER FOR STUDY AND CONTEMPLATION

#### Summer Workshops

##### Quaker Values in Family Life

**Harriet Heath and Larue Evans** July 5-7

Learn how to integrate Quaker values into family life. Separate groups for children and adults as well as united time for worship, play, and other planned activities.

*For families with children ages 3-11.*

\$150/parent; \$25/child

##### Inquirers' Weekend

**Mickey Edgerton and Frank Massey** July 12-14

*Co-sponsored with Philadelphia Yearly Meeting*  
Everything you always wanted to know but haven't had time to ask! Worship, discussion and questions.

\$150

For more information on these and other programs contact Irené Ramsay at (800) 742-3150 or (610) 566-4507  
338 Plush Mill Road · Wallingford, Pennsylvania 19086

#### Resources for Friends Meetings on Issues of Sexual Abuse

The Working Party on Sexual Abuse in New England Yearly Meeting has published an excellent 55-page pamphlet entitled *Addressing Sexual Abuse in Friends Meetings*. This practical collection offers a wide range of information and will be a valuable addition to any meeting library. Included are definitions, legal guidelines, spiritual perspectives, and examples of what other meetings have done. It also outlines suggestions on how to respond to specific situations; for example, if a child should disclose an incident of abuse, if an adult has a need to talk about past abuse, or what to do if a person who is active in the meeting is suspected of being a perpetrator. This valuable guide is available from the FGC Bookstore (800-966-4556) for \$5.00 plus \$3.50 shipping and handling.

Other valuable information is available in *Friends Journal* (November, 1993; July, 1994; and March, 1995) and *Quaker Life* (May, 1994).

*"We expect equality, sensitivity, safety, nonviolence, nurturing, and affirmation from the Quaker community. These expectations are not met. Quakers are a product of our society, and our society treats women and children with violence. Why would we expect our own small society to be any different? Quakers have only begun to face and deal with this issue of violence. . . We are starting the process, not finishing it . . ."*

*In general terms what we want to see is CYM taking responsibility for the following: Remedies for the victim's pain and the situation in which the hurt occurred or may occur, such as when the offender is in a position of power or influence; taking responsibility as individuals and as meetings; condemnation of the action and prevention of its recurrence."* --Report of the Women's Group, Canadian Yearly Meeting, 1992.

## A Quaker Survivor of Sexual Abuse Tells Her Story

I'm an active middle-aged woman and a lifelong Quaker. I work in the non-profit world with children and their parents. I grew up in what was considered a "good family." But there was a lot of abuse, including sexual abuse. My father repeatedly raped me during my childhood. It's scary to admit, and although my father is deceased I still can hear the threats inside me, saying that I deserved it. I learned early on that my mother would not -- could not -- protect me. She had her own problems.

I was twelve years old before I realized that the "hitting" I was getting was far different from what happened in most other families. My main focus throughout childhood was to be good, to be invisible. I assumed that when my father abused me it must be my fault.

My father was a prominent person in the town I grew up in. He was active in the meeting, and people respected him for the good things he did. They never saw the other side of my father. Because my father was so well regarded, as a child I felt that nobody would believe me if I were to tell them about the violence. Also, my father threatened me, and I feared that if I told anyone the abuse would get worse.

How could someone like my father, who was apparently an upstanding member of the community, be so abusive? It was a power thing. He needed to keep everything under control, under his power. If my brother and I didn't follow him -- or if he thought or imagined that we did something wrong -- we got hit. The sexual part of the abuse was not about sex; it was about power. It was my father's way of being stronger, exerting power or control over me. It's like other kinds of abuse, in saying "I can hurt you! You will do as I say!" It was a release for my father's violence and anger, in a way that allowed him to maintain the image of the good citizen.

Years later, as an adult, when I spoke about my abuse for the first time to someone at the meeting where I grew up, I just wanted that person to listen. I needed somebody in the meeting to hear about it, to believe that it happened, to confirm that it is part of reality. Like other survivors, I'm very sensitive to the reaction of others. It took courage for me to talk about it, and I had no intention of hurting the meeting member I was talking to, or making her feel guilty. However, I recognized that what I was saying, and the pain that I still had, scared her, so I stopped talking.

My advice to overseers and others involved in pastoral care is that you learn how to listen. Just listening can be OK. Even if you're uncomfortable with what you're hearing, don't be afraid of it; don't let it hurt you. And don't feel that you have to "fix" it. **Then accept what I say as true. Accept it even if it flies against everything you think you know about the person who abused me. Realize that sexual abuse of children can happen, that Quakers aren't immune. Then, later, don't share what I say with others until you've asked my permission.**

Going to meeting has been important to me all of my life. It has shown me that, in contrast to the ways of my family, there are peaceful ways. Quakerism shows that there is goodness, even when things feel so awful. It teaches me that there is goodness in me, though for many years I thought I was a bad person. And there is God in all.

The meeting where I am a member is a safe place. It's OK to cry in meeting. Problems can be discussed openly. People are there if I need to talk about something. My yearly meeting has sponsored several support groups for Quakers who have been sexually abused. There have been supportive activities for survivors of sexual abuse at the FGC Gathering, and *Friends Journal* has published articles.

This openness can help Quakers get past the concept "not in our meeting" or "not in our town." It can help Friends get past their need to believe that "that type of person just wouldn't do that." I personally know two more people from established Quaker families who experienced sexual abuse, and no doubt there are many others that I don't know about. Quakers need to remember that we're not perfect.

A member of the committee knew something which made him doubt the appropriateness of a person proposed to be working with young people. What to do? In that instance, the person with the concern did speak up and indicated that he could not support the nomination, suggesting that there were issues regarding possible sexual abuse. That act of speaking up set in motion a conflict of significant proportions in the meeting. It opened very strong feelings on the subject of sexual abuse which had never been aired, and caused the meeting to break down into factions. How the meeting courageously faced the issue and how the subsequent healing process strengthened them as a community is an important story too long to be told here. But what can we learn from their experience?

(1) Hard as it is, the fact that suspicion has been raised must be made known to the person in question. With the benefit of hindsight in the example mentioned, the member of the Nominating Committee might have said, when the name was first proposed, "I'm not prepared to approve that name today. I have some serious hesitations, but I have not spoken directly with [the person nominated] to explore those concerns. I would like another member of the committee to go with me while I seek clearness on the right action."

(2) A basic ground rule is that speaking truth clearly and directly, and seeking clearness, are central to who we are as Friends. Once the question has been raised regarding the possibility of a person being sexually abusive, then it must be brought to a closure which is respectful of the community and respectful of the person whose actions and/or intentions are in question. Not all allegations turn out to be well founded. Unfortunately, not all situations are black and white. Can we have the courage to be in honest dialogue with the person in question? How does the person respond in a conversation about the allegations? Is he or she (most likely he) able to be candid and either refute the allegations, giving evidence that they are untrue, sharing something about the circumstances leading to the allegations? Would it be appropriate for the person, if continuing in a teaching role, to accept adherence to a "two person rule," maintaining that another adult will always be present "within eyesight or earshot"?

We know that such searching is challenging and difficult. It is important to remember that we are successful if we proceed prayerfully and openly, in a spirit of true searching which is grounded in truthfulness. Such searching may or may not result in finding a resolution which is comfortable for all concerned.

## Facing the Hard Questions

Overseers are accustomed to being confronted from time to time with matters which are painful and potentially destructive in the lives of members of the meeting community, and which occasionally place at risk the health of the meeting community as a whole. As a meeting forthrightly thinks through together, as a community, the issues raised in this Newsletter, it will find itself face to face with some of the most difficult questions.

(1) How do we come to understand more deeply the difference between holding something (appropriately) in confidence and the destructive dynamic of hiding an ugly secret? Keeping secrets, whether in the life of a family or a meeting, can be part of a larger dynamic of hiding the truth, a dynamic based in shame, denial, or guilt. The decision to reveal the secret should grow out of a process of spiritual discernment, based on a carefully considered sense of what is right. Love and personally felt responsibility may lead Friends to the awareness of their need to talk candidly about issues which are deeply personal, but the committee charged with pastoral care in the meeting needs to consider the right to privacy and the destructiveness of gossip and unfounded innuendo.

(2) If a person with a history as a sexual abuser is a part of our meeting, how do we, as a community, respond? In such a situation a challenging task and an opportunity is offered to the meeting. It requires first and foremost that the children and young people of the meeting be safe. It is not sufficient, however, to have the Nominating Committee quietly (secretly?) build figurative fences around the person. Someone who has abused others is likely to have been abused himself in childhood, and is likely to be deeply conflicted in his desires. He may, at the same time, be looking for opportunities to act upon perverse impulses,

while also seeking protection from acting out those impulses by searching for a spiritual home.

(3) How does a meeting come to grips with the reality that sexual abuse, should it occur in the meeting or anywhere else, is a crime? The meeting must take responsibility for determining local regulations and the responses available from the local child protective agency. That agency's first responsibility will be investigation. The meeting may need to require that the offender undertake treatment, since he may minimize both his need for treatment and the likelihood that further abuses will occur. If a report is to be made, appropriate persons much be chosen to do so, perhaps including the alleged abuser. Once government agencies are involved, the meeting will have little to say about how "the case" is handled from a legal point of view. The meeting will then be challenged with a responsibility for continuing support: seeking healing and reconciliation for the sake of the victim (first of all), and also for the sake of the community and the offender.

Recently an Overseer from another part of the country shared with me how a small core of trusted Friends in her meeting struggled years ago with these questions. A young girl just moving into puberty had been caressed inappropriately by the male leader on a Young Friends' outing. She told her parents, who immediately raised it with an Overseer. The abuser was not a stranger to the meeting, but rather was valued for his spiritual contribution to the meeting and was the father of a young family. A small group of those involved in meeting leadership decided to give careful and on-going attention to his roles in the meeting, seeing that he had no responsibility for children. They suggested that he seek treatment. But (this was twenty years ago) no report to public authorities was made. He may not have followed through on the recommendation that he seek therapy, and the girl and her family were not fully informed of the steps that the meeting had taken. Years later the girl, by then a woman, contacted the meeting and expressed her upset and disappointment that more had not been done.

In the intervening years another sexual violation occurred, perpetrated by the same man with yet another young person. This time the

meeting followed through in a fuller and more thorough way. The Overseer sharing the story, however, reflected on what the years have taught. If the original incident were to occur today, (1) the wider meeting would have been made aware of what had occurred and would have been given an opportunity to talk openly about the issues raised, (2) there would have been appropriate counseling and other support for the young person, her family and friends, and (3) the local child protective agency would have become involved.

Much more could be said on this topic. We have not even begun to mention, for example, the reality that some meeting children are being sexually abused in their families. While thankfully sexual abuse in our meetings and/or wrongful accusation of adults are relatively rare, this is a topic which warrants our attention as Overseers and as a meeting.

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*Lindley Winston, a member of Willistown Meeting, has served for many years as the Consulting Psychiatrist of the Friends Counseling Service. He wishes to acknowledge the support and wisdom which has been offered in the process of writing this article by Harriet Heath, Jean Robbins, Sue Heath and Arlene Kelly.*

#### Questions for Reflection

1. How ready are we to deal with the issue of potential sexual abuse within our meeting? Do we have the courage to acknowledge that the issue of sexual abuse does stir deep feelings?
2. What support do we, as a meeting, need so that we can move forward on this issue? Can we stop and reflect on how our basic beliefs as Friends can serve us in this quest?
3. How does our meeting decide on people to work with our children and young people? What orientation do we give them? What resources are available if they have problems?
4. What is the legal obligation, in our county and state, to report incidents of possible child abuse, sexual or physical? Are we prepared to report, to support reporters, and to see the case pass out of our control and into the law enforcement realm?