



**Philadelphia
Yearly Meeting**

Developing a Child Abuse Prevention Policy

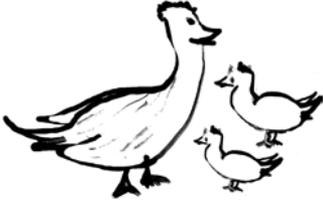
A Monthly Meeting Resource



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 children must feel safe and be safe to grow in God's Light. There are many things we do to create an environment of safety around our children. For example, we maintain confidentiality in worship sharing with children and adults; we care for children tenderly through conflicts with their peers; and we have a high adult-child ratio in our programs. We also take care to choose for these programs adults who will keep the children safe and not harm them.

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 children on their journeys. The adults may be parents, First Day School Teachers, Friendly Adult Presences or simply allies to the children. 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 youth worker positions and show that your meeting is committed to keeping children safe. Maintaining communication, education and awareness and following sound practices such as outlined in this booklet will minimize the risk of abuse of youth and children in your meeting.
- To insure that your meeting is in compliance with your state's laws regarding child welfare.

Policies & Resources



The **Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (PYM) policy** applies to all PYM paid staff and all persons who work in PYM sponsored programs with children and young people under 18, whether paid, compensated by workgrants or fee waivers, or as volunteer “Friendly Adult Presences” (*FAPs*).

- The programs covered by the PYM policy include gatherings of PYM Young Friends (*high school age*), Middle Schools Friends, Children’s Program and other PYM sponsored events.
- The policy includes rules to prevent unsafe situations and requires background checks and references for all children and youth program workers.

Monthly and Quarterly Meetings should develop and institute policies and practices for paid or volunteer first day school teachers and anyone working with children and 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 your meeting and that comply with the laws of your state.

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

Background Checks

PYM conducts Criminal and Child Abuse background checks for volunteers and paid employees working with youth and children in PYM Monthly and Quarterly Meetings. See full procedure on page 6 or visit:

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

Safe Church Resources

PYM is a member of Safe Church and can provide monthly meetings with templates for recommended child safety procedures and responses.

Contact the Volunteer Coordinator:

volunteers@pym.org or 215 241-7238, to learn more.

The 5 Elements of a Child Safety Policy

The following 5 elements outline essential steps of a sound child safety policy. Meetings may contact the PYM Volunteer Coordinator or the Associate Secretary for Program and Religious Life for more detailed examples.

While each meeting's policy may differ in detailed practice, a child 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 child or teenager. If a child is of school age or older, the ratio should be one adult with at least two children, or two adults with one child. If children 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 child have current, cleared background checks, that are in alignment with your state's laws.
- Have other adults check in frequently and unpredictably.
- Insure that adults and children are never isolated behind closed doors.

2 Reference Checks

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

3 Known to Community

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

4 Background Checks

All youth and child care workers should consent, in writing, to a criminal and child abuse background check and that background check should be complete before working with youth. These background checks should comply with state law.

PYM will conduct back-ground checks for Meetings. The procedure for background checking through PYM is outlined on page 6.

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5 Training & Maintaining

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

As youth become older: When youth in your meeting turn 18, there is no switch that goes off, immediately making them peer-worthy adults. In fact, there probably is and always will be a significant power differential between an individual and the people who have 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, whether or not they are "legally" adults.

Getting Started in your Meeting

Discussing why and how the meeting will implement child safety policies and practices establishes an atmosphere of trust. Caring conversation sends a message to youth and everyone else in the community—that you are committed to their well-being and that your meeting is a safe place to discuss difficult situations and topics.



Establish a written policy and procedures that includes:

The 5 Elements of a Child Safety Policy and procedures to address the following:

- **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.
- **Communication & Action Plan** in case the meeting needs to respond to an allegation.

Review Spaces

- Hold all activities for children 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.

Reassurance

Most people would never endanger the youth in your meeting. 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— so 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.

Child Abuse Prevention is only one step toward safety. Consider how to address the physical, emotional and spiritual safety of children in the meeting as well.

How to Conduct Background Checks through PYM

Procedure for Background Checks

The Yearly Meeting processes 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:

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

1. A meeting contact person completes a request form (accessed via the above webpage) listing the names and e-mail addresses of all those 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 signed, the Volunteer Coordinator 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.

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5. Individuals who will be paid (in PA) and certain volunteers working directly with children under 18 may also need to complete the FBI fingerprinting check. PYM staff will provide the appropriate links and instructions in those instances.
6. Once the appropriate background checks have been requested, PYM staff will notify the meeting contact and provide information so that the meeting can follow up on the status of the checks.
7. Meetings should contact references.
8. The process needs to be repeated every 36 months. at least once every three years. Laws differ from state to state. PYM can help you access state guidelines.

Resource Sample Response Plan in the Event of Alleged Child Endangerment



The meeting should have policies and procedures in place for a response in the case that an adult is suspected of abusing a child. A sample policy is available on the PYM website: [**www.pym.org/child-safety-procedures**](http://www.pym.org/child-safety-procedures).

In Pennsylvania, volunteers and paid staff who work directly with children are considered mandated reporters under state law.

- 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/pubs/reslist/rl_dsp.cfm?rs_id=5&rate_chno=11-11172**](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/reslist/rl_dsp.cfm?rs_id=5&rate_chno=11-11172)

Contacts *For information and background checks, contact:*

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www.pym.org/what-we-do/youth-programs



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