

## **Bethesda Friends Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)**

**Adopted: April 11, 2021**

### **Youth Safety Policy**

Quakers believe the Divine exists in every person. We are committed to honoring that of God in everyone and to providing an environment in which every member, attender, and visitor -- whether a child or an adult - can be free from harm or fear. We respect each other through our actions, and in that spirit, we adopt this policy.

This policy has been created to provide direction to the Meeting in the selection, hiring, and training of employees and volunteers who are responsible for the supervision, guidance, and teaching of our children, as well as a committee structure to deal with concerns about their safety.

Bethesda Friends Meeting (BFM) cherishes the children and youth who participate in our programs and activities. They are a vital part of our faith community. We seek a community where no child (or adult) is at risk for emotional, physical or sexual abuse. We seek a community where a mutual sense of trust allows children and adults to speak out when they feel uncomfortable or unsafe, where difficult issues can be discussed, and where our loving concern for one another is strengthened, not diminished, by these discussions.

BFM seeks to prevent the occurrence of child abuse within its programs. Prevention occurs in various ways that include:

- screening youth worker applicants, checking references, conducting criminal background checks, and periodically re-checking criminal records;
- training youth workers on the signs and symptoms of possible child abuse and on this Youth Safety Policy;
- monitoring staff during youth activities; and
- creating, and monitoring compliance with, youth program procedures that implement this Policy.

The policies and procedures laid out in this Youth Safety Policy reflect obligations that apply to all of us – not just our teachers, other volunteers, and child care providers, but also parents and all other members of our community. Therefore it is important that all members of our community understand this Policy and that we all work together to ensure its full implementation.

We have reviewed and approved the practices outlined in this document. By implementing these practices, our goal is to protect the children and youth of Bethesda Friends Meeting from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior.

The practices set forth in this Policy are not designed to replace good judgment and common sense. No policy can anticipate all situations. As a general principle, when in doubt, this policy should be implemented by minimizing the risk of abuse. Protecting and honoring children and youth is not a static event; it is a process that evolves with changing governmental regulations and the circumstances of each interaction. This working document will be evaluated and updated when necessary and reviewed

regularly every four years, or more frequently if necessary, by the Youth Safety Committee, which consists of the Clerk of the Meeting, and the Clerks of the Pastoral Care Committee, the Childcare Committee, and the Religious Education Committee or their designees. The Youth Safety Committee will determine a date in the near term for this policy to take effect.

## I. Definitions & Acronyms

For purposes of this document, the following definitions apply:

**Adult** refers to someone 18 years or older.

**BFM** refers to Bethesda Friends Meeting.

**Child Care** refers to the BFM Child Care Committee.

**Child, children, minors, and youth** are defined as including anyone under the age of eighteen (18).

**The Clerk of the Meeting, or the Clerk**, as used in this Policy, includes both Co-Clerks of BFM unless the Co-Clerks have designated one Co-Clerk as responsible for Youth Safety matters.

**Infrequent volunteer** means an adult who volunteers up to three times in any 12 month period.

**Parent** includes a guardian or other adult entrusted by the parent or guardian with custody of a child.

**RE** refers to the BFM Religious Education Committee.

**Youth Program** includes childcare (ages 6 months through age 5) and first day school (age 5 through age 17).

**Youth worker** refers to anyone, adult or teen, who works with children on a regular basis, whether paid or unpaid, including:

- Those who provide child care and First Day School during worship, committee meetings, Meeting for Business, and special events.
- Those who lead and assist Child Care and First Day School and other youth programs and events.

## II. Youth Safety Committee

The Youth Safety Committee acts on behalf of the Meeting to ensure implementation of this Policy and otherwise to address concerns about the safety and well-being of children participating in BFM programs or otherwise on BFM premises. Any concerns for youth safety that arise from background checks of prospective employees and volunteers, from information about adult employees or volunteers provided at any time by other sources, or from any suspected incident of abuse or neglect, must be referred to the Youth Safety Committee. The Youth Safety Committee must also ensure monitoring of youth workers and compliance with procedures and consider concerns about implementation of the Youth Safety Policy that are brought to its attention and that cannot be immediately resolved by the appropriate Committee of BFM. The Youth Safety Committee consists of the Clerk of the Meeting, and the clerks of the Pastoral Care Committee, the Religious Education Committee, and the Child Care

Committee. The Youth Safety Committee determines who serves as its clerk. Its members serve ex officio (i.e. they do not go through the nominating committee process). The clerks of Pastoral Care, Child Care, and RE may designate a member of their committee to serve on the Youth Safety Committee in their stead. At any time where a designee of a committee clerk resigns, the relevant committee clerk serves on the Youth Safety Committee until that clerk appoints a successor.

### III. Selection of Youth Workers

The Youth Safety Committee manages the application and screening process for selecting youth workers. This process does not apply to guest speakers, one-time or infrequent volunteers, and parents staying in a class or child care with their own child.

The screening process includes the following:

#### a) One Year Rule (Volunteers)

A person may be considered to serve as a youth worker only after having been involved with Bethesda Friends Meeting for a minimum of one year.

#### b) Application

Every prospective youth worker must complete an application that includes the names and contact information for at least two references, who are not related to the applicant.

#### c) Personal Interview

Every prospective youth worker will have a personal interview with at least 2 members of the Youth Safety Committee to determine their suitability, and to clarify expectations for the work involved.

The interview provides an opportunity for the applicant:

- to discuss their interest and suitability for this service;
- to discuss this Youth Safety Policy
- to receive a copy of this document and sign a form acknowledging receipt and review of the policy
- to learn about next steps in the selection process, including the background check and reference check;
- to discuss critical information that may result from the criminal background check, including the applicants' transparency concerning contacts with the criminal justice system, whether they are disqualifying or not.

#### d) Criminal Background Check

A criminal-background check is required for all prospective (and current) youth workers. This check is coordinated by the Youth Safety Committee through a professional background check service that is selected by the Committee and paid for by the Meeting. An applicant will not be approved as a youth worker if the background check shows: Conviction of, imposition of a deferred sentence for, or any plea of guilty or no contest at any time, or the existence of any pending charges, for (i) any crime involving sexual misconduct, (ii) any crime of abuse against children, (iii) any crime involving firearms, (iv) any offence involving distribution or intent to distribute illegal drugs or substances, or (v) felonious assaults or batteries. A person may not serve as a youth worker unless they have had a background check within three years of the date of service.

**e) Reference Check**

After interviewing the applicant, the Youth Safety Committee must contact at least two of the applicant's references. Reference checks can be conducted by phone, video conference, in person, or by email. The purpose of the reference check is to determine whether the applicant has the character and interpersonal skills that justify entrusting the applicant with the supervision of children. If the applicant has worked with minors within the past five years, the reference interviews should include someone from that organization or the family where the applicant worked with minors, if possible. The Youth Safety Committee must maintain notes from reference calls, including contact information, in a password protected file.

**f) Teenage Assistants (under 18 years old)**

Teenage assistants must be at least 15 years old. They must be screened as specified above, except that criminal background checks are not required. Teenage assistants who assist teachers in First Day School classes or Child Care or otherwise supervise children must be under the supervision of a youth worker 18 years or older.

**g) Confidentiality**

Personal information gained during the screening process about any individual must be held in confidence by the Youth Safety Committee and disseminated outside the Committee only to serve the purposes of the youth safety policy. Confirmation of background check approval for each youth worker must be saved in a locked filing cabinet or a password protected file kept by the Youth Safety Committee.

**IV Other Safety Measures****a) Two Youth Workers**

At least two youth workers must be in attendance when a child or children are being supervised during BFM activities. If only one youth worker is present with a supervised child or children, the youth worker must either:

- recruit another youth worker to be a second youth worker; or
- join another group with the child or children.

Only under the supervision of a fully screened youth worker may unscreened parents and other infrequent volunteers qualify as a youth worker to meet the two youth workers requirement.

A teenage assistant who is under the supervision of an adult youth worker qualifies as a second youth worker.

Temporary absence of a second youth worker in accordance with the bathroom procedures under this policy, or other absence of a youth worker for a short period where needed, does not violate the two youth worker requirement.

**b) Unlocked Doors**

Doors to classrooms and child care rooms must never be locked while supervised children are inside the room.

**c) Contact with Youth Outside of Meeting Programs**

A youth worker must not establish private communication outside the Meeting's youth program (in person or by phone, text, email, Instagram or other technologies) with a youth participant in any of the Meeting's youth programs, except for communications with the knowledge and consent of the child's parent, or communications to a whole group or class.

**d) Parental Responsibility**

Parents are responsible for their children during times when children are on BFM premises but have not been placed under the supervision of a youth worker. Unsupervised children may occupy common spaces in the Meetinghouse where they are visible, such as the library during meeting with the doors to the meeting room open, or the patio immediately adjacent to the Meetinghouse, but may not be inside any building on the campus other than the Meetinghouse. Parents are responsible for making sure their children comply with this rule.

**e) No Sexual Activity**

Any sexual activity between any Youth Worker and a youth participant in a BFM program in which the Youth Worker is involved is prohibited.

**f) Check-in/Check-out**

The relevant committee in charge of supervision of children must establish procedures by which a parent places their child under the supervision of a youth worker. This may involve a written check in/check out or an oral process. These procedures, including the times that children may be placed under the supervision of a youth worker and released from that supervision, must be made available on the BFM website and kept up to date so that parents are aware of the applicable rules.

**g) Restroom Procedures**

To protect children and youth from harm and help youth workers avoid accusations of wrongdoing, youth workers must follow the procedures set out in Appendix 2 regarding supervision of restroom visits by children and youth under their supervision.

**h) Oversight and Implementation**

The Meeting must review this policy, as well as associated practices and implementation, every four years, or sooner if necessary. That review must be carried out by the Youth Safety Committee. A calendar and procedure will be developed for this review, which includes the following:

- Make recommendations to the clerks of Religious Education and Child Care for improving child protection in First Day School or the Child Care program.
- Compare the written Youth Safety Policy document with current practice to affirm strengths and identify areas of practice that are not consistent with that policy.
- Develop ideas for making the Youth Safety Policy more practical and effective, both for safeguarding children and for optimizing resources (especially time and labor) to avoid placing needless burdens on First Day School, Child Care, or others in the Meeting community.
- Review the confidential personnel records of background checks and reference calls to confirm that these practices are well-implemented, and to provide appreciation, support, and guidance to those involved with those due diligence tasks.
- Report to Business Meeting about the results of the review process to reassure and inform the Meeting community, while also documenting the completion of that review process in the Business Meeting minutes.
- The report to the Business Meeting should take place no later than every four years from the month of the previous report.

After the review is completed, the Youth Safety Committee will report any resulting recommendations to Meeting for Business and make requests for improving RE and Child Care procedures to strengthen child protection in accord with these best practices.

The Youth Safety Committee will undertake additional annual reviews to confirm ongoing full implementation of this Policy, and provide annual reports to the Meeting for Business.

**i) Reporting Incidents or concerns to the Youth Safety Committee**

Appendix 1 details procedures for reporting concerns about possible child abuse or neglect. Any Meeting member or other person who becomes aware of, or suspicious that, an incident of child abuse or neglect has occurred must immediately notify a member of the Youth Safety Committee, whose members are identified in the Meeting Directory. The Youth Safety Committee must create and maintain records of reports received and actions taken on those reports. The person must also report incidents of abuse to Montgomery County Child Protective Services at 240 777-4417 or the police at 301 279-8000, as required by law and as detailed in Appendix 1.

Safety concerns may also arise that are not allegations of child abuse or neglect and which do not call for the response described in Appendix 1. Any person (parent, employee, volunteer, child or other person) with a concern regarding safety of a child or children in the Meeting is encouraged to take the concern to a member of the Youth Safety Committee.

**j) This Policy to be publicized.**

This policy must be publicly posted on BFM's website.

**k) Prevention Awareness.**

The Youth Safety Committee must facilitate at least one training session annually on youth safety and the prevention, recognition and reporting of child abuse. All child-care and youth workers must attend this session, or if unable to attend, must listen to or watch a recording of this session. Additionally, we encourage all adults in our Meeting community to attend such educational sessions.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Responding to Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect**

#### **I. Definitions of Child Abuse and Neglect According to Maryland Law**

BFM operates in Maryland and we are therefore governed by Maryland law. The specific Child Abuse Laws pertinent to Maryland are contained in the Maryland Code, Family Law, and some excerpts are in Appendix 3. While this Policy is mainly aimed at child abuse, Maryland law imposes identical requirements to report incidents or suspicions of both child abuse and neglect.

a. Child abuse generally includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Any treatment, action or behavior or lack thereof to a child by any parent, household or family member, or other person having permanent or temporary care or responsibility for supervision or authority over the child that is not accidental, and that causes or creates substantial risk of causing physical, sexual or emotional harm or injury to that child, whether there was an intent to harm the child or not. This includes actions or behaviors that are direct as well as indirect through writing, phone calls, texting, instant messaging, via any form of social media or any other form of communication or interaction.
- Any act that involves sexual molestation or exploitation of a child by any parent, household or family member, or other person having permanent or temporary care or responsibility for supervision or authority over the child. These acts include incest, rape, sodomy, and sexual offense, as well as actions or behaviors that are direct as well as indirect through writing, phone calls, texting, instant messaging, via any form of social media or any other form of communication or interaction.

b. Neglect generally includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Any action or failure to act that harms or creates a substantial risk of harming a child's physical or mental health, such as failing to provide proper supervision and care, or adequate, food, water, shelter, or medical care, by a caregiver who bears responsibility for providing such.

#### **II. Steps in Handling Suspected or Actual Abuse**

1. In the event of suspected child abuse or neglect, the following procedure shall be followed in accordance with Maryland Family Law section 5-704 and 5-705:
  - i. The individual who suspects or observes an incident of child abuse or neglect shall, as soon as possible,
    - a. make an oral report of the suspicion or incident to Montgomery County Child Protective Services (240 777-4417) or Montgomery County Police (301 279-8000), with guidance from the Youth Safety Committee if there is a question concerning whether this is a reportable event, AND
    - b. Report the suspicion or incident to a member of the Youth Safety Committee.

- ii. In order to document the oral report, the individual must also make a written report to Child Protective Services or the police within 48 hours of the incident. The Youth Safety Committee will be available to provide support and assistance to the individual as appropriate.
2. If applicable, the employee or volunteer alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave from working with children and will not be permitted to participate in any activities involving children or youth, pending an investigation. The Pastoral Care Committee will be available to provide pastoral support as appropriate to the alleged perpetrator.
3. The parent of the youth will be notified by the Youth Safety Committee as soon as possible, except in circumstances in which such parent is the alleged abuser.
4. In situations where the parent is available and not the alleged abuser, the Youth Safety Committee will assist as requested by the parent to care for the needs of the child. If the parent is not immediately available or is the alleged abuser, the Youth Safety Committee will ensure that the alleged victim receives immediate medical attention, if and as appropriate.
5. Investigation of the suspicion or incident is the responsibility of the civil authorities who are trained for this purpose. Members of the Youth Safety Committee and all others involved are expected to cooperate fully with any investigation. In the course of any investigation, all involved are reminded that confidentiality is important to the alleged victim as well as the alleged perpetrator. Any person ultimately found guilty of abuse by the authorities will be permanently removed from their position with children or youth and will not be permitted to participate in any activities involving children and youth in BFM.
6. The Clerk of BFM will ensure that all required reports to the civil authorities are made and that internal written records are kept regarding the suspicion or incident. The internal records should include, in detail, all steps taken by BFM in compliance with this policy and state law, as well as all actions to foster the healing of everyone involved. These will be kept in a locked file or secure digital location.
7. BFM's insurance carrier will be notified by the Clerk of the Meeting, if relevant.
8. After consultation with BFM legal counsel if needed, the Clerk will determine whether, to what extent and by whom internal announcements or reports will be made within BFM to Friends.
9. The Youth Safety Committee and BFM's legal counsel if applicable will together determine what information might need to be communicated to help the community recover. This group will make decisions about communicating information and facilitating healing and will assist in carrying these out.



10. The Youth Safety Committee will contact the victim and their parents to inform them of steps that were taken in order to keep other parents informed.
11. At the conclusion of the investigation, if it is determined by the civil authorities that they do not have enough information to move forward, or if the suspicion is unsubstantiated, the Youth Safety Committee will determine whether any further internal steps need to be taken.
12. Throughout the process, including decisions about communication within the BFM community, the confidentiality of both the youth and the accused is very important. All are asked to keep this in mind as decisions are made and related actions occur.
13. The Clerk will consider who in the community needs support as a result of the incident and if the community as a whole needs to heal, and if so take appropriate steps to promote such support and healing.

## Appendix 2

### Restroom Procedures

The goal of these procedures is to facilitate restroom visits, maintain healthy relationships, encourage appropriate boundary management, protect children and youth from possible harm, and help youth workers avoid accusations of wrongdoing.

#### ***Procedures for Child Care Program (children ages 6 months through Pre-Kindergarten )***

For children in diapers, the youth worker must make sure to get their parent's permission, with relevant instructions and materials, before changing diapers. For children who don't need diapers, a youth worker must accompany the child to the restroom. The youth worker must allow the child to use the restroom as independently and privately as possible and provide assistance as needed. The youth worker must never touch a child in private areas. The youth worker and child must return to class after finishing the bathroom visit.

#### ***Procedures for First Day School Children Ages 5-6***

The youth worker supervising the child will allow the child to leave the classroom to go to the bathroom and will observe the child to make certain the child arrives at the restroom alone. If the youth worker cannot see from the classroom whether the child arrived at the bathroom alone, the youth worker must accompany the child to the restroom, after informing the other youth worker. If the child needs assistance, the youth worker will provide whatever help is needed and take care never to touch a child in private areas. If there is an accident that soils or wets a child's clothing, the youth worker should get help from the child's parent, unless the parent has previously outlined and given permission to address this in advance.

#### ***Procedures for First Day School Children and Youth Ages 7-18***

Children and youth from seven to eighteen years old may use the restroom on their own, without supervision or accompaniment. However, one of the youth workers in charge should monitor restroom departures with sufficient attention to recognize when an unusual amount of time has passed. In those cases, a youth worker should search for the child or youth to determine whether the child or youth needs help or redirection back to class.

#### ***Special Needs***

If a child or youth has a disability or a special need, the restroom protocol may need adaptation (for example, by applying the protocol for a different age group) in accord with instructions from the parent. If there is an accident that soils or wets a child's clothing, the supervising adult should get help from the child's parent unless this concern has already been addressed with the parent.

#### ***Managing Expectations and Communications***

Parents should receive these procedures, with a request to provide any special information about their child that may be needed to help youth workers provide appropriate assistance or supervision for using the restroom. Parents should provide children with clothing they can manage independently, if possible.

## **Appendix 3**

### **Child Abuse Laws in Maryland**

#### **Definitions of Child Abuse and Neglect**

(b) (1) "Abuse" means:

(i) the physical or mental injury of a child under circumstances that indicate that the child's health or welfare is harmed or at substantial risk of being harmed by:

1. a parent;
2. a household member or family member;
3. a person who has permanent or temporary care or custody of the child;
4. a person who has responsibility for supervision of the child; or
5. a person who, because of the person's position or occupation, exercises authority over the child.

(2) (ii) "Abuse" does not include the physical injury of a child by accidental means.

(r) "Mental injury" means the observable, identifiable, and substantial impairment of a child's mental or psychological ability to function caused by an intentional act or series of acts, regardless of whether there was an intent to harm the child.

(s) "Neglect" means the leaving of a child unattended or other failure to give proper care and attention to a child by any parent or other person who has permanent or temporary care or custody or responsibility for supervision of the child under circumstances that indicate:

- (1) that the child's health or welfare is harmed or placed at substantial risk of harm; or
- (2) mental injury to the child or a substantial risk of mental injury.

(x) "Sexual abuse" means any act that involves:

(1) sexual molestation or exploitation of a child by:

- (i) a parent;
- (ii) a household or family member;
- (iii) a person who has permanent or temporary care or custody of the child;
- (iv) a person who has responsibility for supervision of the child; or
- (v) a person who, because of the person's position or occupation, exercises authority over the child.

(2) sex trafficking of a child by any individual.

(z) "Sexual molestation or exploitation" includes:

(1) allowing or encouraging a child to engage in:

- (i) obscene photography, films, poses, or similar activity;
- (ii) pornographic photography, films, poses, or similar activity; or
- (iii) prostitution;

- (2) incest;
- (3) rape;

- (4) sexual offense in any degree;
- (5) sodomy; and
- (6) unnatural or perverted sexual practices.

*Maryland Code, Family Law § 5-701*

### Individual Responsibility

- (a) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, including any law on privileged communications, each health practitioner, police officer, educator, or human service worker, acting in a professional capacity in this State: **(1)** who has reason to believe that a child has been subjected to abuse or neglect, shall notify the local department or the appropriate law enforcement agency; and **(2)** if acting as a staff member of a hospital, public health agency, child care institution, juvenile detention center, school, or similar institution, shall immediately notify and give all information required by this section to the head of the institution or the designee of the head.
- (b) **(1)** An individual who notifies the appropriate authorities under subsection (a) of this section shall make:
  - (i) an oral report, by telephone or direct communication, as soon as possible to the local department or appropriate law enforcement agency; and
  - (ii) a written report:
    - 1. to the local department not later than 48 hours after the contact, examination, attention, or treatment that caused the individual to believe that the child had been subjected to abuse or neglect; and
    - 2. with a copy to the local State's Attorney.

*Maryland Code, Family Law § 5-704*

### Content of Reports

- (c) Insofar as reasonably possible, an individual who makes a report under this section shall include in the report the following information:
  - The name, age, and home address of the child
  - The name and home address of the child's parent(s) or other person responsible for the child's care
  - The whereabouts of the child
  - The nature and extent of the abuse or neglect of the child, including any evidence or information available to the reporter concerning possible previous instances of abuse or neglect
  - Any other information that might be helpful to determine the cause of the suspected abuse or neglect and the identity of any individual responsible for the abuse or neglect.

*Maryland Code, Family Law § 5-704*

**Persons required to notify authorities and report suspected instances of abuse or neglect; exceptions**

(a)(1) Except as provided in paragraphs (2) and (3) of this subsection, notwithstanding any other provision of law, including a law on privileged communications, a person in this State other than a health practitioner, police officer, or educator or human service worker who has reason to believe that a child has been subjected to abuse or neglect shall notify the local department or the appropriate law enforcement agency.

(1) A person is not required to provide notice under paragraph (1) of this subsection:

(i) in violation of the privilege described under § 9-108 of the Courts Article;

(ii) if the notice would disclose matter communicated in confidence by a client to the client's attorney or other information relating to the representation of the client; or

(iii) in violation of any constitutional right to assistance of counsel.

(2) A minister of the gospel, clergyman, or priest of an established church of any denomination is not required to provide notice under paragraph (1) of this subsection if the notice would disclose matter in relation to any communication described in § 9-111 of the Courts Article and:

(i) the communication was made to the minister, clergyman, or priest in a professional character in the course of discipline enjoined by the church to which the minister, clergyman, or priest belongs; and

(ii) the minister, clergyman, or priest is bound to maintain the confidentiality of that communication under canon law, church doctrine, or practice.

**Agency to notify the other agency**

(b)(1) An agency to which a report of suspected abuse or neglect is made under subsection (a) of this section shall immediately notify the other agency.

(2) This subsection does not prohibit a local department and an appropriate law enforcement agency from agreeing to cooperative arrangements.

**Oral or written report**

(c) A report made under subsection (a) of this section may be oral or in writing.

**Contents of report**

(d)(1) To the extent possible, a report made under subsection (a) of this section shall include the information required by § 5-704(c) of this subtitle.

(2) A report made under subsection (a) of this section shall be regarded as a report within the provisions of this subtitle, whether or not the report contains all of the information required by § 5-704(c) of this subtitle.

*Maryland Code, Family Law, § 5-705*

**Failure to report suspected abuse or neglect of child**

**In general**

(a) A person who is required to provide notice of suspected abuse or neglect of a child or make a written report of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under § 5-704 of the Family Law Article may not knowingly fail to provide the required notice or make the required written report if the person has actual knowledge of the abuse or neglect.

**Penalty**

(b) A person who violates this section is guilty of a misdemeanor and on conviction is subject to a fine not exceeding \$10,000 or imprisonment not exceeding 3 years or both.

**Scope of section**

(c) This section applies only to a failure to report child abuse or neglect that occurs during the time the child is a minor.

*Maryland Code, Criminal Law, § 3-602.2*