

Baltimore Yearly Meeting Youth Safety Policy

Approved by BYM Interim Meeting, October 17, 2009

General Purpose Statement

Baltimore Yearly Meeting seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children and youth who participate in our programs and activities. We strive to provide an atmosphere of openness and trust both among children, among adults, and between children and adults. We seek Divine guidance in all aspects of our programming, operations and staffing. We affirm that the adults in our programs have the responsibility for the safety and care of all, but especially the children in our programs. We also recognize that, regardless of written policies, careful attention and vigilance needs to be maintained to nurture this atmosphere and provide individuals the opportunity to experience safety in our community.

All of our youth programs honor that of God in every person. After research, thought, discussion, and prayer, we have created here policies and procedures to promote the safety of all within the Yearly Meeting community while respecting the Light within each of us. The policy set forth in this document acknowledges that each of our youth programs is unique and has different operating norms. Therefore, this document strives to provide overarching policies and guidelines which allow each program the flexibility needed to operate.

These procedures focus on prevention, support, clarity and allowing room for healing. By implementing the following practices, our goal is to maintain quality care and protection of the children and youth of Baltimore Yearly Meeting. The Yearly Meeting also seeks to protect staff and volunteers working in contact with youth in any of the Yearly Meeting's programs from false accusations.

Definitions

For purposes of this policy, the terms “child,” “children,” or “youth” include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years. “Worker” refers to someone who is working within Yearly Meeting programs which includes paid staff, work-grant recipients and volunteers. “Applicant” refers to anyone who is applying to be a worker. “Participant” is any individual, regardless of age, who is involved in a Youth Program not as a worker.

Within Baltimore Yearly Meeting programs some “youths” may indeed be a “worker” while some people over the age of 18 may be “participants”. Therefore, each program will further clarify this differentiation as necessary.

Selection of Workers for Positions Supervising Youth

People who oversee the Baltimore Yearly Meeting programs serving youth are charged with the responsibility of discerning the suitability of staff and volunteers working with our youth. All Baltimore Yearly Meeting employees and any persons who desire to work directly with the children participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This need not apply to non-supervisory volunteers, such as cooks and maintenance workers in the Camping Program who are parents, legal guardians, or other family members of participating campers; or short term workshop leaders. This screening includes the following:

a. Six-Month Rule:

In an effort to ensure that we know the individuals who will help our youth develop and be asked to serve as role models, no volunteer will be considered for any position involving supervisory contact with minors until she or he has been known to a Quaker community for a minimum of the past six (6) months. Quaker communities may include Friends schools, Friends camps, Monthly Meetings or other Quaker organizations.

b. Written Application:

All applicants need to complete and sign a written Baltimore Yearly Meeting application. The application, which may include an addendum for a particular program, will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into such matters as previous experience with children, religious affiliation, a release for Meetings and others to provide a reference and employment information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application form will be maintained in confidence on file at the Baltimore Yearly Meeting office.

c. Applicant Interview:

Upon completion of the application, a personal interview or in-person training program will be scheduled with the applicant to consider his/her suitability for the position. Procedures for conducting and documenting the interview or training process will be determined by the particular youth program.

d. Reference Checks:

Before an applicant is permitted to work with children and youth in any Baltimore Yearly Meeting program at least two references will be checked. These references would preferably be from Yearly Meeting monthly meetings or from other organizations where the applicant is known. Individuals familiar with the applicant but not identified by him or her may be contacted as a reference. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file at Baltimore Yearly Meeting offices.

Criminal Background Check

A national criminal background check is required for all adult workers within Baltimore Yearly Meeting Youth Programs. Until the background check is complete, no adult applicant will be allowed to volunteer or be employed in any of the youth programs. Background checks may be repeated based upon the specific youth program's policy and need.

Parents and F(f)riends well known to Baltimore Yearly Meeting may be temporary workers in a youth program without having a completed background check if they are never left alone with children and do not serve overnight.

Before a background check is run, prospective workers will be asked to complete and sign an authorization form allowing Baltimore Yearly Meeting to run the check. Intentional failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the background authorization form and/or declining to sign the authorization form will be a basis for prohibiting the individual from work with children in our programs. The applicant needs to make known any extenuating circumstances regarding criminal convictions at this time.

Conviction of a crime does not mean that someone could not work with children nor does it mean that he or she does not have gifts to offer the Baltimore Yearly Meeting community. Yet in order to protect the safety of our youth, individuals convicted of any of the following types of crimes will not be employed nor serve as volunteer in our youth programs:

- Any crimes involving predatory behavior toward children, including pornography;
- Or any of the following within the past 10 years: Any type of aggressive incident against another individual
 - Any type of stalking or threatening incident against another individual;
 - Any misuse of weapons;
 - Any crimes related to production or distribution of drugs
 - A record showing repetitive or habitual use or possession of drugs.

Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the entire process. The background check authorization form and results will be maintained in confidence on file at the Baltimore Yearly Meeting office. Should the criminal background check indicate any of these convictions, the Yearly Meeting staff will communicate with the applicant and notify him or her of the reason s/he is not eligible to work with youth in Baltimore Yearly Meeting programs. The applicant has the right to a copy of the report. If the applicant believes that the criminal background report is incorrect, s/he may go through the appropriate legal channels to correct it and then reapply. Baltimore Yearly Meeting staff will notify the person responsible for the youth program that the applicant is not currently eligible to work with youth. Generally, the details about the applicant's ineligibility need not be shared. Under certain circumstances, if concern for safety or the care of children arises, sharing information may be deemed necessary. In these instances the General Secretary, relevant program staff and committee clerk will consult. The Yearly Meeting Presiding Clerk may substitute for the General Secretary as needed.

Teenage Workers

We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for workers (paid or volunteer) who are under age 18 to assist in caring for children during programs or activities. The following guidelines apply to such workers:

- Teenage workers should be at least age 14;
- Teenage workers need to provide a written reference from a parent and from their monthly meeting or another Baltimore Yearly Meeting program that should include their prior experience working with children; and

- Teenage workers should be under the supervision of an adult and have ready access through cell phone or other means to the responsible adult involved with the program when that adult is not immediately present.
- An appropriate age gap between the teenage worker and the children under their and appropriate ratio of worker: children will be determined by each program.

Worker - to - Youth Ratios

Given that our Yearly Meeting youth programs serve children from infancy through early adulthood, each youth program will develop guidelines for their programs and events that identify the maximum number of youth one worker may be responsible for supervising. Programs employing workers under the age of eighteen (18) years will include in their guidelines the discernment of ages a teen worker may supervise and the difference in number of participants a youth worker may reasonably be expected to supervise.

Two-Adult Guideline

For the protection of all, it is our goal that a minimum of two adult workers will be in attendance at all times when minors are being supervised during our programs and activities. We try to avoid one-on-one (adult-child) situations behind closed doors. We encourage any private conversations to be held in public view. Due to Federal Medical Privacy laws, there may be times when approved medical personnel are alone with a youth. In some programs and facilities it is difficult to ensure that two or more adults can be with youth. In these instances, workers will try to ensure that they are not alone with only one unrelated youth and that classroom doors will remain open if no window is present. Workers are never to be alone with a child in a private bathroom/ or bathroom stall with the door closed.

Open Door Policy

When a program involving youth uses a classroom or other meeting room, the door to the room should always remain open unless there is an uncovered window in the door or a side window beside it which provides a clear view into the room. Doors should never be locked while persons are inside the room.

Check-in/Check-out Procedure

All programs which serve youth within the Baltimore Yearly Meeting will have clear check-in and check-out procedures which ensure that the staff/volunteers can account for the number, identity and whereabouts of the youth under their care from arrival to departure. Each program will provide the particular procedures which provide for these safeguards.

Discipline Policy

Baltimore Yearly Meeting strives to create a safe and nurturing environment where youth of all ages can experience the community of Friends. Our program leaders and staff work hard to use conflict resolution familiar to Friends when the need arises. Physical discipline such as spanking, grabbing, or hitting children is unacceptable under any circumstance. Workers should consult with the program director or committee clerk if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

For purposes of this policy, “child abuse” is any action (or lack of action) which endangers or harms a child's physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes but is not limited to the following:

- Physical abuse - any physical injury to a child which is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting;
- Emotional abuse - emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of threats, constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing;
- Sexual abuse - any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between a child and another child at least four years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography; and
- Neglect - depriving a child of essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, or medical care.

If an individual suspects abuse or neglect of a child in Baltimore Yearly Meeting programs or elsewhere s/he will immediately notify 1) the Yearly Meeting program staff person or 2) the committee clerk immediately responsible for the program for further action, including reporting to authorities as may be mandated by state law. In any of these situations, the program staff person, the committee clerk, and the General Secretary need to be notified as soon as practical.

Steps in Handling Incidents of Abuse

While our youth programs strive to foster communities of caring and respect for all, we recognize that the possibility for abuse or neglect exists. The confidentiality of both the youth and the accused is very important, as is the healing of the community.

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at a Baltimore Yearly Meeting program event or activity, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. Baltimore Yearly Meeting will comply with state requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists.
2. The parent or guardian of the youth will be notified.
3. The employee or volunteer alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave from working with children pending an investigation and will be told not to participate in any activities involving children and youth pending completion of the investigation.
4. The child protective service in the jurisdiction in which the alleged incident occurred will be notified and the program staff person and the individual who witnessed the incident will together complete an incident report.

5. Baltimore Yearly Meeting's insurance carrier will be notified.
6. The Clerk of the Program Committee (or Supervisory Committee for staff), the General Secretary, the Presiding Clerk of Yearly Meeting, and the Program Staff Member will together determine what limited information might be needed to help the program community recover. This group will make decisions about communicating information and facilitating healing and will assist in carrying these out.
7. Baltimore Yearly Meeting officials will cooperate with any investigation of the incident by state or local authorities. Any person found guilty by the state or local authorities of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from his or her position with children or youth and will not participate in any activities involving children and youth in Yearly Meeting.
8. If there is no investigation of the incident by state or local authorities, the procedure outlined in #6, above, will be followed. The team should act in consultation with our insurance company and/or attorney as outlined below in the section under resolution of inappropriate behaviors.
9. The Presiding Clerk of Yearly Meeting will be our spokesperson to the media if necessary concerning incidents of abuse or neglect. If s/he is alleged to be involved, in which case the Interim Meeting Clerk will be the spokesperson. All others should refrain from speaking to the media.

Resolution of Alleged Inappropriate Behavior of Current Volunteers/staff:

Inappropriate behavior is recognized as something that is very difficult to define and will vary from program to program depending on the developmental stage of the participants. For example, it may be appropriate for an adult worker to hold a one year old in his/her lap and cuddle them, it is not appropriate for an adult worker to hold a sixteen year old in his/her lap and cuddle them. That said, inappropriate behavior is generally related to interpersonal boundaries, and feelings of safety on an individual and community level.

A. Internal Concerns

Situations can arise in which a worker involved with Baltimore Yearly Meeting youth appears to be acting in an inappropriate manner either toward the youth or toward others in the program. Such situations are to be handled in the following manner.

The perceived inappropriate behavior will be brought attention of the person in charge (PIC), i.e. Camp Director, Youth Secretary, Designated Friendly Adult Presence (DFAP), or program director, by the individual(s) observing or receiving a report about the behavior.

The PIC will work with all the individuals involved to attempt to bring clearness to the situation.

If the concern appears to be of a serious nature, the PIC will note the concern in writing and notify the program staff person or the program committee clerk of the concern as soon as possible. The General Secretary or designee must be consulted as soon as possible and throughout the entire process.

If the behavior is deemed serious by the PIC or the General Secretary, the individual in question will be notified that he/she is being put on inactive status and cannot participate in any Baltimore Yearly Meeting youth program until the matter is cleared up.

An inquiry will be initiated by the program staff person, in concurrence with the General Secretary, to determine any of the following:

1. the charges are groundless,
2. the situation is non-threatening, but indicates a lack of good judgment,
3. the situation indicates a serious lack of appropriate behavior,
4. boundaries needed to create a safe and nurturing environment for youth have been crossed, or
5. the situation is serious enough that it needs to be reported to the appropriate outside authorities.

If the situation is as described in (2), a plan for close supervision will be established by the program staff person in conjunction with the relevant committee and they will establish a plan to review as to its success.

If the internal inquiry indicates that the individual should be barred from the youth program, the program staff person may contact the clerk of individual's Monthly Meeting to convey the general outline of the situation and to request that the MM attend to the spiritual and emotional needs of the individual.

Information about the situation will be shared only on a limited, need-to-know basis. Any written documents will be kept in a confidential file in the Baltimore Yearly Meeting office.

B. External Concerns

An individual may question the appropriateness of a worker's involvement with youth based upon that worker's behavior outside Yearly Meeting activities. When such a concern is brought to the attention of a Baltimore Yearly Meeting youth program leader care needs to be taken to discern the appropriate steps. These steps shall be determined by the program staff person, program committee clerk and the General Secretary and may include any of the steps listed above. At all times respect and concern needs to be held for all involved and information about the situation will be shared only on a limited, need to know basis.

Training

Baltimore Yearly Meeting youth programs will provide training on this child protection policy to all staff and volunteers working with our children and youth and will strive to provide opportunities for additional training classes or events on a regular basis. All workers are expected to attend a training class.

Policy Revisions

The Youth Safety Policy Committee, either a standing committee or one appointed by the Yearly Meeting ad hoc, would be responsible for seasoning any future revisions to this policy and bringing them to Interim or Yearly Meeting.