

# **Policy on the Safety of our Meeting's Children**

## **Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends**

Approved by Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting on May 2009. This policy was updated April 2020. This policy replaces any earlier CPMM policies that address the safety of the meeting's children, and the reporting of abuse and misconduct allegations.

### **I. Background and Goals**

Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting (CPMM) strives to be a safe place, both physically and emotionally, for all members of our community. We recognize that children have fewer resources for protecting themselves and less experience at ensuring their own safety than adults do. Additionally, children tend to trust adults who have positions of authority. This policy is intended to give our community a common understanding of how we, as a meeting, protect our children while they are involved in CPMM's programs with children.

The goals of this policy are to provide guidance and requirements for CPMM's programs with children that:

- \* Support CPMM as a loving, safe community where we know and value each other across age groups.
- \* Limit, to the highest degree we can, the potential for our volunteers and employees to be in a situation where their integrity could be questioned regarding interactions with children.
- \* Outline clearly the response to be taken to a report of suspected or known child abuse.
- \* Fulfill requirements of our insurance policy, thereby ensuring that our meeting has the proper insurance coverage that allows us to be responsible to the members of our meeting community (both members and attenders.)
- \* Provide clear and explicit guidance that addresses the specific nature of our programs with children and our meetinghouse space, as well as guidelines broad enough to encompass potential future programs.

### **II. Definitions**

1. Child/children: minor/minors: Any person/persons under the age of 18 years old.
2. Confidentiality: is understood to mean keeping information private beyond those who have a need to know. The need to know is determined by what is required to ensure the safety of

children in the meeting, what is required to ensure a complete investigation and what is required to ensure compliance with applicable law.

3. Counseling: A situation that involves one-on-one interaction for the purpose of personal guidance or exploration.
4. Employee: Any person who provides paid labor for CPMM on a regularly scheduled basis. This includes anyone who is hired to provide childcare on a weekly or semiweekly basis.
5. Lead position: A volunteer position with the primary responsibility for carrying out the program, including health and safety aspects. Non-lead volunteers may plan and lead activities but do not have the primary responsibility for health and safety.
6. Child Abuse and Neglect Reportable Offense and Sexual abuse of children are understood to be defined by all applicable laws, including but not limited to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Child Protective Services Law (CPSL). A copy of relevant sections, as of the date of this policy's approval, is appended. Care should be taken to ensure that the current definitions are being used at the time of any incident that requires use of this policy.

This is PA law. Information is linked here from the [www.keepkidssafe.pa.gov](http://www.keepkidssafe.pa.gov) website:

Employees:

[http://www.keepkidssafe.pa.gov/cs/groups/webcontent/documents/document/C\\_135246.pdf](http://www.keepkidssafe.pa.gov/cs/groups/webcontent/documents/document/C_135246.pdf)

Volunteers:

[http://www.keepkidssafe.pa.gov/cs/groups/webcontent/documents/document/C\\_135249.p](http://www.keepkidssafe.pa.gov/cs/groups/webcontent/documents/document/C_135249.p)

7. Volunteer: Any person who provides unpaid labor for CPMM for children's programs. This includes First Day School teachers and child care volunteers. This would also include leaders and assistants for activities that may be established in the future such as a CPMM youth group.
8. Meeting Sponsored Event: A structured event led by CPMM and supervised by CPMM. Social hour is not a meeting sponsored event. First Day School is a meeting sponsored event.

### **III. Policy**

All activities and programs sponsored by CPMM at which children are present will be designed to address the three risk factors for child abuse: isolation; accountability; and power and control. This is done to ensure, to the highest degree possible, the safety of our children. In the event of a situation of abuse or suspected abuse, a full investigation will be conducted.

The meeting will follow all applicable laws which include at this time this policy was approved, the Child Protective Services Law (CPSL). At the time this policy was approved, CPSW

included “clergy” in its list of people explicitly included in the category of those who must report or cause a report to be made when the person has reasonable cause to suspect that a child is a victim of child abuse.

Investigation of known or alleged abuse is not discretionary; all allegations will be investigated according to the procedures outlined in Appendix A, and where mandated by law will be reported to the appropriate authorities.

This policy encourages the Clerk of the Meeting and the Clerk of Membership Care Committee to receive training in recognizing and reporting child abuse.

The following procedures apply only to programs and activities that are sponsored by CPMM and therefore do not apply to informal interactions, such as parents or guardians with their own children or when parents/guardians arrange care for their own children outside of formal child care arrangements.

**A. Procedures relating to ensuring the safety of our children.**

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1. No child is to be alone one-on-one with an adult in any Meeting sponsored activity. “Alone” means behind a closed door or in an isolated location in the building.

For example, First Day School and Child Care activities are meeting sponsored activities. When the child care teacher is caring for one child, that child care teacher will either join the First Day School group or go out into a public space where other adults are present. When a child needs to use the restroom, the child care teacher brings another person along either an adult or a child.

To be clear, during social hour parents are responsible for their children.

If the meeting develops a program whereby one-on-one mentorship or counseling one-on-one is provided an exception will be made, but the expectations will be clearly set.

2. If an adult is alone with a group of children, the activity must be visible to other adults in the area. This means that either the door must remain open, there must be a window or glassed area into the room that provides visibility. Additionally, this means that the activity must take place in an area where other adults are present and aware of the program.

3. Staff or volunteers will not leave children unsupervised.

4. If a child goes missing during a Meeting sponsored event, the parent/guardian will be notified immediately. With the parent/guardians input the appropriate authorities, including the police will be notified. The Clerk of the Meeting and the Clerk of First Day School will be notified.

4. No one under the age of 18 may be in a lead position involving contact with children. If minors are providing child care, it must be under the supervision of an adult who is physically present.

5. Volunteers involved in overnight activities. CPMM will perform at a minimum, statewide criminal background searches and child abuse clearances on all volunteers taking leadership involved in overnight activities with minors and counseling of minors. The First Day School Committee will be responsible for ensuring that these background searches and clearances are conducted and kept on file with the CPMM office. CPMM will also keep on file in the Meeting office a signed statement that the individual has read and understands this policy, and that any questions the individual has about the policy have been explained.

7. Employees. CPMM will keep on file in the Meeting office a signed release form for all employees that gives CPMM permission to perform criminal background searches. This release will also state that the individual has read and understands the policy, and that any questions the individual has about the policy have been explained.

CPMM will perform national background searches and child abuse clearances on all employees who provide programs, care or supervision for the Meeting's children. The Office Committee will be responsible for this, with the First Day School Committee being available to provide technical assistance. CPMM will recognize a valid background child abuse clearance performed by another organization as a fulfillment of this requirement.

CPMM will perform reference checks on all new employees, checking two references at a minimum for each employee. The references must be of an institutional nature (i.e., former employers or other organizations at which the individual has volunteered.) as opposed to personal friends or relatives. The person serving as a reference must have known the individual for some length of time. These reference checks will be performed by appropriate members of the Meeting, such as the Meeting's clerk or members of the Office Committee. These reference checks will be maintained on file in the CPMM office.

## **B. Procedure for addressing allegations of abuse**

In the event an individual knows or suspects that a child is being abused (including child sexual abuse), that individual will immediately notify the Clerk of the Monthly Meeting or the Clerk of Membership Care Committee. If the suspected abuse or neglect appears very serious, as in someone is in danger, the person aware of the situation will call 911. All members of our community should report suspicions of abuse to the Clerk of the Monthly Meeting or the Clerk of Membership Care Committee. Due to their explicit leadership roles in the meeting as pertains to children, people in roles requiring clearance of some level to work with children are required to report any suspicions of abuse. These roles are:

1. All volunteers and paid staff in any lead position involving contact with children.
2. All volunteers involved in overnight activities with minors, counseling of minors, and one-one mentorship of minors.
3. All CPMM employees.

The policy of individuals within CPMM reporting allegations to the Clerk of the Meeting or the Clerk of Membership Care Committee in no way countermands an individual's ability to report an allegation directly to child welfare authorities, independently of the Clerks.

In the event that the alleged perpetrator is the Clerk of the Meeting or the Clerk of Membership Care, then the report will be made to the non-involved Clerk. That Clerk will determine whom, within the framework of the meeting, will be the second person named to assist in the investigation and management of the allegation. Should the substitution of a third person for either of the two Clerks be necessary, the two persons carrying the matter forward are, nevertheless responsible for carrying out fully the steps outlined below, and will determine between them the appropriate differentiation of the responsibilities.

Similarly, if either of the two Clerks is not available within a reasonable period of time (several hours to a day), the Clerk who is available will seek assistance from an appropriate third person, while continuing efforts to keep the Clerk not available informed.

Because such allegations are extremely serious and sensitive, the Clerk and the Membership Care Clerk (or the persons serving in lieu of one of the other of these persons) are reminded that they are to maintain appropriate confidentiality at this point.

The Clerk of the Meeting and the Clerk of Membership Care (or the persons serving in Lieu of one of the others of these persons) will upon receiving notice of alleged abuse, immediately proceed according to the Procedures outlined in Appendix A. Procedures to be Followed in Processing a Report of Known or Suspected Abuse.

### **C. Allegations arising from outside the Meeting-**

If the Meeting is informed by the Clerk of PYM, the Clerk of another Monthly or Yearly Meeting, or any other respected source of a pending reported incident of child abuse (including child sexual abuse) against an adult who participates in Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting, the Clerk will inform the accused person and will suspend that individual from contact with children in the Meeting pending the results of the investigation undertaken by the reporting organization. In this situation the clerk of the Meeting will, within the bounds of confidentiality and need to know, inform others within Central Philadelphia.

## **IV. Ensuring ongoing dissemination of this policy and its related procedures**

Membership Care Committee in coordination with First Day School will make this policy available to parents of children involved in Meeting programs. Those volunteering with child care and children's programs will be oriented to this policy prior to taking up their work and will receive this policy in writing. Membership Care Committee in coordination with First Day School, the child care liaisons, and the child safety policy trainer will review this policy every three years and recommend changes as needed.

## **V. Contact with the Media**

The Clerk of the Monthly Meeting or his/her designee is the only person responsible for and authorized to speak with the media if that becomes an issue.

## **VI. Summary**

In our commitment to live in loving covenant with the Divine and with one another, we will do our best to treat everyone involved in such incidents with tenderness and respect – the victim, the family, the perpetrator and the individual who may be falsely accused – knowing that we are all children of God.

# **APPENDIX A**

## **Procedures to Be Followed in Processing a Report of Known or Suspected Child Abuse**

### **Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (CPMM)**

These procedures are designed to help those in leadership roles in CPMM respond to suspicions, and to reports of suspicions of child abuse. These procedures cannot anticipate all circumstances that might arise. These procedures provide a framework; deviation from these procedures should be taken if the circumstances of an individual situation warrant it.

#### **I. How should members of the CPMM community report suspected or known abuse?**

In the event an individual knows or suspects that a child is being abused (including sexual abuse) while participating in activities under the care of the Meeting, that individual will immediately notify the Clerk of the Monthly Meeting or the Clerk of Membership Care Committee. If the suspected abuse or neglect appears very serious, someone is in danger, the person aware of the situation will call 911. This procedure in no way countermands an individual's ability to report an allegation directly to child welfare authorities, independently of the Clerks.

In the event that the alleged perpetrator is the Clerk of the Meeting or the Clerk of Membership Care, then the report will be made to the non-involved Clerk. That Clerk will determine whom, within the framework of the meeting, will be the second person named to assist in the investigation and management of the allegation. Should the substitution of a third person for either of the two Clerks be necessary, the two persons carrying the matter forward are, nevertheless responsible for carrying out fully the steps

outlined below, and will determine between them the appropriate differentiation of the responsibilities.

Similarly, if either of the two Clerks is not available within a reasonable period of time (several hours to a day), the Clerk who is available will seek assistance from an appropriate third person, while continuing efforts to keep the Clerk not available informed.

Because such allegations are extremely serious and sensitive, the Clerk and the Membership Care Clerk (or the persons serving in lieu of one of the other of these persons) are reminded that they are to maintain appropriate confidentiality at this point.

#### **A. Making a written record.**

The Meeting Clerk will assist the person making the allegation of child abuse in creating a written record, which includes the following information:

- \* date written record is created
- \* name, address and telephone number of the person bringing forward the allegation.
- \* identity of the person accused and the contact information, if known
- \* identity of the alleged victim(s) and contact information if known.
- \* names of any eye witnesses to the alleged incident or persons who may have direct knowledge of the incident and their contact information.



