

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS (QUAKERS) OF AUSTRALIA YEARLY MEETING

SUPPORTING A SAFE QUAKER COMMUNITY POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE POLICY

Australia Yearly Meeting is committed to a safe, secure, loving and respectful environment for everyone.

This policy is intended to support Quakers to be a safe, supportive and caring community for young people, vulnerable adults, survivors of abuse, communities and those adults affected by abuse. This policy is applicable to adults and should be read alongside AYM's Child Protection Policy.

There is a particular care for those whose vulnerability is increased by situations, by disabilities or by reduction in capacities. We recognise that this increased vulnerability may be temporary or permanent and may be visible or invisible, but that it does not diminish our humanity. We seek to affirm the gifts and graces of all God's people.

This policy is relevant to all aspects of the life of Australia Yearly Meeting including Yearly Meeting, all Regional and local meeting activities, residential camps, retreats, committees and other activities within the life of Quakers in Australia.

This policy is intended to reduce the risk of any misconduct or abuse, and to ensure a caring and appropriate response if such misconduct or abusive behaviour should occur in a Quaker setting. It is part of the overall approach within the Society to sustain members and attenders in a caring environment, and is additional to the provisions for handling conflict (Section 4.6 of the Handbook).

This policy does not cover minor incidents of disrespect and interpersonal conflict where people may be offended, have their feelings hurt or upset. This does not mean these situations are not significant to the person affected. Discussion, clearness meetings and mediation can contribute to resolve such incidents. It may be helpful to consult a trusted Oversight and Pastoral Care committee members/s or a trusted Friend about such matters.

2. ORGANISATIONAL OBLIGATIONS

The Religious Society of Friends recognises that it has a duty of care for everyone involved and an obligation to uphold Quaker traditions and testimonies as durable foundations for treating everyone with dignity and respect.

Australia Yearly Meeting recognises the importance of:

- Providing a safe environment for all

- Promoting a sustaining healthy relationship between people
- Providing appropriate support and assistance for persons
- Challenging violence, oppression, discrimination and abuse
- Expressing its faith and principles in action and
- Providing an environment which is conducive to these aims.

It is also accepted that the Religious Society of Friends and all within its community are subject to relevant Federal and State/Territory legislation and principles established through law.

The Society is obliged to do whatever it can to prevent abuse, harassment or bullying occurring within its domain and to deal compassionately and effectively with any instance that arises. This includes referral to government and non-government agencies with legal responsibilities to take action and appropriate recording of events and action taken. It is important not to ignore situations that are damaging to people in our care but it is also vital that we know our limits. Sometimes we need to refer incidents to community resource people and sometimes we encounter situations that cannot be resolved.

Abuse in any form is intolerable. However abusive situations or relationships is a common problem worldwide. When it occurs, the harm can be severe and long lasting. No section of society is immune and it is vital for all organisations to have a policy and procedures in place to prevent abusive/unsafe behaviour and for dealing effectively with the occurrence of incidents and complaints.

Quakers and other faith communities cannot be complacent in this matter by relying on their commitment to integrity, and loving, respectful, trusting, respectful relationships among their members and attenders.

Quakers could be involved in this issue in a variety of ways. A Friend or Attender may be:

- Victimised by someone outside their Meeting (within or outside the family)
- Someone within the Meeting may be accused of, or responsible for, abuse or misconduct with a person outside the Meeting, or both parties may be within the Meeting
- A person who has been abused may attend a Meeting and ask for support or
- A Meeting may choose to work in this area of concern more generally in the community with victims or offenders as part of a commitment to social justice and peace.

Awareness, forethought, education and preparedness are key elements of preventing abuse and for coping effectively with situations that may arise.

3. DEFINITIONS

Abuse and unsafe situations and/or behaviours may be physical, verbal, visual or written. They are often repeated, although if serious, only one incident is enough to be acted upon. Some conduct may not be abusive at first, but if the person initiating

it continues the behaviour after being asked to stop, it may become harassment, bullying or abuse.

Abuse

Abuse and neglect may occur in a family, in a community or in an institution. It may be perpetrated by a person or persons known to the person or by a stranger/s; by an adult or by a child. It may be an infliction of harm or a failure to prevent harm.

Bullying

Bullying is a form of psychological and/or physical harassment. The bully uses their strength or power to pressure, intimidate or humiliate.

Misuse of power

Often abuse occurs when one person has power and authority over another. This may lead to assent which is coerced or tolerated in a spirit of misplaced trust. It may appear consensual but the validity of consent is negated by the power difference.

Inappropriate Physical Incidents

These may involve, but is not limited to, invasion of personal space, brushing against the body, touching, exposing intimate body parts, stroking, fondling, pinching, poking, embracing, snuggling, kissing, exposure, penetrative sex and assault.

Inappropriate Verbal Incidents

These may include sexual comments, innuendo, jokes, propositions, insults, threats.

Inappropriate Visual Examples

These may be the display of sexually explicit or suggestive posters, pictures, art work, films, videos, literature, gestures and bodily exposure.

Protection

This is a part of safeguarding and promoting peoples' welfare. This refers to the activity which is undertaken to protect people who are suffering or are at risk of suffering significant harm, including neglect.

Safe Community

One which all those involved is able to feel secure and free from abuse, harassment and bullying.

Safe Quaker Community Contact Friends

A person who is appointed by their RM to listen, support and explore courses of action if a person is feeling abused, unsafe, abused or sexually, physically or emotionally harassed or bullied. A Contact Friend may also assist a person who has had a complaint made against them (although they cannot help both parties).

Vulnerable Adults

Any adult aged 18 or over who, by reason of mental or other disability, age, illness or other situation is permanently or for the time being unable to take care of her or himself, or to protect her or himself from harm or exploitation.

Written Communication

This includes letters and electronic communication. Inappropriate use of email, text messages and social networking websites can lead to abusive interactions.

Any person within the care of Quaker Meetings may be regarded as having been abused if subjected to any physical act, or threat of such, verbal remark, visual image, or written situation which is inappropriate or unacceptable. This may be overt or subtle and includes behaviours described as sexual harassment, molestation, misconduct or misbehaviour. In extreme situations, these forms of abuse, discrimination and bullying is unlawful.

4. PREVENTION AND PREPAREDNESS

This policy is written in a spirit of trust and openness. Trust should be founded on sensible precautions and good practice, which in turn foster trustworthy behaviour. It is vital that each Meeting and AYM be prepared to deal with any abusive or unsafe relationship issue that may arise. It is also important that each Meeting and Quaker gathering actively work to foster a culture where each person is safe and respected.

Policy: Adopting the Safe Quaker Community policy

Establish which Regional Meeting Committee will take overall responsibility for safety matters, in most cases this may be the Oversight/Pastoral Care Committee. The committee would be responsible for:

- Keeping up-to-date on the subject, including knowledge of local legislation
- Supporting Safe Quaker Community Contact Friends
- Ensuring a list of all Australian Yearly Meeting Safe Quaker Community Contact Friends is displayed in the Meeting House
- Liaising with Local Recognised Meetings and Worshipping Groups and
- Conducting an annual review of the implementation of “Supporting a Safe Quaker Community” policy.

Each Meeting should have the policy as an agenda item at a Business Meeting annually as a way to remind Friends that this issue needs to be constantly in our minds. The Queries (Appendix 2) could be used at this time.

Each Meeting should find ways to review the way they promote the policy on a regular basis. This could include:

- Annual discussions in appropriate committees – e.g. Oversight/Pastoral Care, Children’s committee, JYF/YF committees
- Regular items in the RM newsletter
- Holding an annual awareness session.

People: Treating everyone equally – living out the testimony to Equality

Central to this is that we always respond to that of God in everyone.

Regional Meetings will appoint two Safe Quaker Community Contact Friends, preferably one male and one female, and pay for costs of obtaining a “working with children and vulnerable adults” clearance. Each Contact Friend will be expected to undergo an induction and attend “Safe Quaker Community” training, within the first year of appointment.

Ensure Safe Quaker Community Contact Friends are ex-officio members of Pastoral Care/Oversight Committees to recognise the link between their role and pastoral care.

Promoting acceptable intimacy – it is important that Friends continue to develop and maintain significant friendships within their Quaker community.

It is important that each Meeting has members who attend educational sessions on these issues. It may be appropriate to join in workshops offered by other churches in your local area. e.g. Uniting Church of Australia, Anglican Church of Australia.

It is also important for the Safe Quaker Community Contact Friends to attend national Safe Quaker Community Contact Friends workshops.

Place: Creating a safe, secure and loving place

Each Meeting is to display the Yearly Meeting Safe Quaker Community poster and/or details of Safe Community Contact Friends from around Australia in a prominent place (including photos of local contacts).

Each Quaker premises should be assessed for safety for all people, particularly vulnerable adults, and the risk assessment report will be given annually to the appropriate Regional Meeting in written form. This will include fire safety procedures. and keeping track of who has keys to Quaker buildings.

Where the building is hired for community activities, the person who signs the letting agreement should be reminded that it is their responsibility to have appropriate safeguarding policies in place.

5. ADDRESSING ABUSE SITUATIONS AND RESPONDING TO AN INCIDENT

An issue requiring attention as a possible issue of alleged abuse or misconduct may arise in, or in some way be associated with, a Meeting (Yearly or Regional, including associated local Recognised Meetings) as a complaint or the attendance of a suspected or known abuser. The actual nature and details of what presents as a problem could vary widely.

Initial Contact

Anyone voicing a complaint, witnessing an incident or having knowledge of an event, or of a person, which is relevant to an aspect of alleged abuse or unsafe behaviour/s associated with a Quaker activity may seek out the Clerk, a trusted Friend or someone on the Oversight/Pastoral Care committee.

If this is the case, they should also be told that there are Safe Quaker Community Contact Friends to assist them and they could be helped to make contact with one of them. The matter may relate to the present or to the past.

The person may also approach the Safe Quaker Community Contact person in the first place.

Dealing with the Complaint

A Safe Quaker Community Contact Person(s) will support and inform the person and assist them to make a decision as to how they wish to proceed. Various options are open for consideration, including assisting the person to deal with the situation themselves, referring the matter to the Oversight/Pastoral Care Committee, seeking outside expertise or referring to an outside agency (e.g. support or advice from other churches, medical attention, counselling, legal advice). If Friends consider the law may have been broken, the Police may need to be contacted.

Options for resolution may include speaking to the person, mediation or using various Quaker conflict resolution processes. The goal is to resolve the matter as satisfactorily as possible, providing healing, assistance to all persons affected, enhanced prevention of abuse and incorporating truth and justice.

Some Meetings may involve another Church or another organisation to assist. Meetings are encouraged to establish such co-operative arrangements in advance. The Safe Quaker Community Contact Friends are expected to have knowledge of resources within their Meeting and in the local community. This will include legal and medical counselling and may include persons especially skilled in abuse issues.

Whatever the nature and apparent severity of the disclosure, all persons involved must be dealt with seriously, sensitively, supportively and compassionately. Safety must be assured and appropriate records must be kept, confidential, secure and only for use in a professional manner. No attempt should be made to reprimand a complainant or to dissuade a complainant from proceeding with a complaint.

Confidentiality

Assurance should be given that confidentiality will be honoured, subject to legal obligations, the safety of others and voluntary consent for disclosure.

Reporting

Secure confidential files will be kept by the Safe Quaker Community Contact Friend. The Oversight and Pastoral Care Committee, in consultation with the Contact Person(s) and person complaining, will decide if an alleged serious incident will be reported to the police. The Committee and Contact Friend will liaise with the AYM Secretary and Clerk regarding informing the Meeting's insurer.

Follow Up

After an issue has been dealt with formally, it may be appropriate for the Safe Quaker Community Contact Friend/s to continue to monitor the situation.

Pastoral care and support should be provided to all who are involved. If there was an alleged incident/s, this could have implications for the health and well-being of the Meeting. It may be helpful to have someone from outside the local Meeting to be involved in pastoral care.

6. ACTIONS FOR AUSTRALIA YEARLY MEETING

The Safe Quaker Community Committee will support and offer national workshops to Safe Quaker Community Contact Friends around Australia.

The Committee will develop resource material where appropriate.

The Australia Yearly Meeting Safe Quaker Community Committee will review this policy by July 2018 and establish procedures for monitoring this policy.

7. REFERENCES CONSULTED IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS POLICY

Guidelines for the Promotion of Respectful Relationships in Australian Quaker Meetings, Australia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) Inc.

Policy Guidelines for Child Protection, West Australian Regional Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). 16 December 2004

Policy on Sexual Harassment, Canadian YM Personnel Committee

The Religious Society of Friends, Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa / New Zealand *Information about the Issue of Sexual Harassment and Sexual Abuse and procedures for dealing with Sexual Harassment and Sexual Abuse Complaints*. A guide and resource manual for New Zealand Quakers, 2009

Britain Yearly Meeting publications

NCCA Safe as Churches Consultation booklets

Anglican Church of Australia Guidelines

Every School's Worst Nightmare: Child Sexual Abuse, Freda Briggs, March 9, 2005

Sample Child Protection Policy & Procedures, EIG - Ansvar Limited, 2004

U.K Methodist Church Safe Church policy documents.

APPENDIX 1

SAFE QUAKER COMMUNITY CONTACT FRIEND (SQC CF) ROLE DESCRIPTION

The role of a Contact Friend is to listen, support and explore courses of action if a person is feeling abused, unsafe, abused or sexually, physically or emotionally harassed or bullied.

Role description

1. Be the first point of contact for a person who wants to report an incident/s. Listen to a person who reports an incident/s
2. Discuss what outcome the person wants and options for achieving this, including possible actions. Help them understand what might be possible or reasonable
3. Work closely with other Contact Friend/s and other relevant people such as the Oversight Committee/Pastoral Care about reporting and managing of incidents
4. Ensure the person who has raised the issue has appropriate ongoing support from a person of their choosing
5. Ensure the alleged person complained about also has appropriate support.

Responsibilities

1. A Contact Friend will promote and ensure the *Supporting a Safe Quaker Community* policy is implemented in their Regional Meeting and to participate in the national implementation of this program
2. Act in a sensitive, impartial and non-judgemental manner
3. Work with the other Contact Friend person in your Regional Meeting and/or other SQC CF's with due regard to confidentiality
4. Ensure that appropriate follow-up is undertaken of a reported incident to the reasonable satisfaction of the person reporting the incident
5. Ensure organisers of Quaker events implement the policy
6. Be informed about appropriate Quaker conflict resolution processes (Handbook 4.6), State legislation, community and church resources and the availability of trained counsellors and/or mediators.
7. Participate in SQC CF meetings/teleconferences, national workshops and reviews of the policy and its implementation.

APPENDIX 2

QUERIES FOR AUSTRALIAN QUAKER MEETINGS

Regional Meetings will need to take regular preventive and pro-active steps to ensure the safety of members and attenders, and to be ready to deal effectively with alleged incidents of abusive or unsafe relationships if they should occur. These questions are designed to help Meetings assess whether they are preparing themselves.

1. Has your Meeting adopted the Australian Yearly Meeting “Supporting a Safe Quaker Community Policy”?
2. Has your Regional Meeting appointed one Overseer/Pastoral Carer or another Friend with particular responsibility for the implementation of this policy?
3. Have the Safe Quaker Community Contact Friends received training?
4. Has your Meeting established links with any local church or other agency to supply training or additional expertise as needed?
5. Has your Meeting conducted a session in the last twelve months to raise and discuss these issues with all Friends and Attenders?
6. Are notices posted in your Meeting house that promote the Meeting as a Safe Place, including name and relevant information regarding the Safe Quaker Community Contact Friends?
7. Has the information on the Safe Quaker Community Contact Friend/s been published in the Meeting’s newsletters in the last twelve months?
8. Does your Meeting consider the policy in planning special events?
9. Are the worshipping groups and local meetings in the care of your Regional Meeting incorporated in all these matters?