

# **Herndon Friends Meeting Minute on Protecting Youth from Physical, Verbal, and Sexual Abuse**

## **Revised November 2021**

Herndon Friends Meeting (HFM) recognizes its responsibility in assisting parents in protecting children from physical, verbal, and sexual abuse. The Meeting, which has no paid staff, has established the following procedures to minimize the risk of children being harmed in the course of Meeting connected activities.

### **Definitions**

- “Candidate” refers to an individual expressing interest in serving in an unpaid leadership position in a youth activity sponsored by HFM.
- “Screening”: Process by HFM that includes verifying that a candidate has regularly attended HFM for at least six months; checking the *National Sex Offender Public Website* and *VA Sex Offender and Crimes Against Minors Registration for Violent Sex Offenders* website against the person’s name and address; performing a national criminal background check; and requesting two references.
- Youth activity: Any activity primarily aimed for youth participation, such as First Day school, a field trip, a social activity (onsite or offsite), service project, etc.
- Community Room: Area of Meeting house outside meeting for worship, including kitchen, baby room, and cabin, whether separated by dividers or not.

### **Procedures for Working with Youth**

1. All volunteers must have been cleared by the HFM Ministry and Pastoral Care committee before leading any youth activities and must remain in good standing per our procedures for clearing candidates.
2. There will be at least two cleared adults present during any youth activity.
3. At least two cleared adults will be at any offsite location for any youth activities held there. At least two adults must accompany the children from the HFM Meetinghouse to an offsite location for any activity.
4. Field trips or day trips sponsored by the Religious Education Committee, or the Meeting will require supervision by adults, with a ratio of at least one cleared adult to six children. There will be a minimum of two cleared adults on any field trip.
5. Any overnight field trip attended by both male and female youth should have adult supervision by both male and female cleared adults.
6. Any vehicle used for transportation associated with HFM youth activities must be operated by a cleared adult.
7. All adult visitors wishing to attend a First Day School class need to coordinate with the class teacher or coordinator.
8. HFM does not sponsor any regular or extended one-on-one counseling for youth. Any counseling done with youth (such as a clearness committee) will include at least two cleared adults.

### Procedures for Clearing Candidates to Work with Youth:

Anyone interested in volunteering with youth needs to be screened and cleared by the Ministry and Pastoral Care (M&PC) committee before they can lead a youth activity. This includes, but is not limited, to the following:

- First Day school teachers
- Adult leaders for an HFM-sponsored youth activity (such as game night, service project, or field trip) or any activity primarily aimed at youth participation, or adults in a supervisory role (such as childcare or escorting children to another location)

As a part of the screening process, candidates will be provided with resources on youth safety.

The responsibilities of the M&PC committee in clearing candidates include the following:

Screening: For candidates to lead a youth activity:

1. Confirm that the candidate has regularly attended HFM for at least six months
2. Request 2(two) references and follow up with those individuals
3. Verify the candidate's identity and address with a government-issued photo identification,
4. Verify that the candidate is not listed in the *National Sex Offender Public Website* and *VA Sex Offender and Crimes Against Minors Registration for Violent Sex Offenders* website.
5. Conduct a national criminal background check. Before a background check is run, prospective candidates will be asked to sign an authorization form allowing the meeting to run the check. If an individual declines to sign the authorization form, they will be unable to work with children.

What constitutes a disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the M&PC Committee on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency, and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event.

Individuals known by the M&PC committee to have charges pending or have been convicted of sexual crimes will not be permitted to lead a youth activity. If M&PC determines that a candidate for working with youth does not meet HFM criteria or if there are other concerns, M&PC will not clear the candidate. M&PC will determine what further action is needed.

6. Maintain the background check authorization form and results in confidence in a secure location.
7. M&PC will maintain a list of people who have been cleared to lead youth activities and will provide this list, and any updates, to all HFM committee clerks.

8. Confirm, every three years, that cleared volunteers are interested in renewing their cleared status and if so, that they continue to meet HFM criteria for working with youth.

## Response to Concerns or Incidents

Anyone who has a youth safety concern about an individual should share that concern with the Meeting clerk or the clerk of M&PC. If a concern is raised, M&PC will investigate and will contact the individual, if necessary. Criminal offenses must be reported to authorities.

Anyone who observes an incident of youth physical, verbal, or sexual abuse during an HFM sponsored activity or who has knowledge that such an incident has occurred should do the following:

- Take immediate action to protect the child.
- Contact the Clerk of Meeting or the Clerk of M&PC immediately to report the alleged abuse. The Clerk of Meeting or the Clerk of M&PC will notify the child's parents or guardians of the reported abuse. The Clerk of Meeting or the Clerk of M&PC will determine if additional actions are needed, such as contacting child protective services, legal action, or notifying the HFM insurance representative. The Clerk of Meeting or the Clerk of M&PC will discuss the incident and the proposed response from HFM with the child's parents or guardians. The Clerk of Meeting or the Clerk of M&PC will determine when the entire meeting needs to be notified.
- Written documentation should be kept for all steps.

## Sick Child Policy

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all of the children at Herndon Friends Meeting. Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other children when deciding whether to place a child under our care. In general, children with the following symptoms should NOT be dropped off:

- Fever, diarrhea, or vomiting within the last 48 hours
- Green or yellow runny nose
- Eye or skin infections
- Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease

Children who are observed by volunteers to be ill will be separated from other children and the parent or guardian will be contacted to request that the child be taken home.

## Medications Policy

It is the policy of Herndon Friends Meeting not to administer either prescription or nonprescription medications to the children under our care. Medications should be administered by a parent at home. Parents are reminded of our sick child policy.

Exceptions to the medications policy may be granted to parents of children with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions). Parents of such children should address their situation with the Clerk of the Religious Education Committee and/or the Clerk of the Meeting to develop a plan of action.

## Discipline Policy

It is the policy of Herndon Friends Meeting not to administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There should be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children. Volunteers and parents should consult with the Clerk of the Meeting if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

## Restroom Guidelines

If taking one child to the bathroom would leave one adult alone with children, then the door to the classroom should be left open or the entire class should take a restroom break. For children aged five years and under who need to use the bathroom, volunteers should help check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, then allow the child inside. The volunteer should then remain outside the bathroom door, leaving the bathroom door ajar, and escort the child back to the classroom. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the volunteer should call the child's name. If a child requires assistance, the volunteer should prop open the bathroom door and leave the door open as he/she assists the child.

For children over the age of five, when possible, an adult male should take boys to the restroom and an adult female should take girls. The volunteer should check the bathroom first to make sure that the bathroom is empty, then allow the children inside. The volunteer should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom.

For the protection of all, volunteers should never be alone with a child in a bathroom with the door closed and never be in a closed bathroom stall with a child. Parents are strongly encouraged to have their children visit the bathroom prior to each class.

## Accidental Injuries to Children

In the event that a child or youth is injured while under our care, the following steps should be followed:

1. For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide First Aid (Band-Aids, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child's parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up from our care.
2. For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent and/or guardian will immediately be summoned. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.

## Regular Review of Procedures and Education

HFM currently has no paid staff. If we hire employees or change venues, we will revisit these procedures. In any case we will reevaluate our procedures every three years at a minimum. To maintain awareness of our procedures, HFM will post this minute in a visible place at the Meetinghouse. In addition, the clerk of Religious Education will distribute copies of this minute yearly to:

- a, Parents of children registered in the HFM religious education program
- b, HFM committee clerks and the clerk of HFM
- c, All adults cleared to work with youth serving in a leadership position in activities dealing with youth, including (but not limited to) all First Day School teachers and class coordinators.

HFM will also conduct activities to raise awareness of issues related to protecting youth from physical, verbal, and sexual abuse.

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