Abuse and Exploitation
Adopted 2018 for a provisional period expiring at the Spring 2019 session of the Continuing Committee

Friends’ testimonies (see “Testimonies” pp. xx–xx), along with our belief that there is that of God in everyone, encourage a heightened awareness of the need for care in our relationships with one another. Still, Quakers recognize that, despite our testimonies and our highest aspirations, members and attenders of Friends meetings are not exempt from weaknesses. We are all capable of hurting each other, and we are all at risk of being hurt. Some hurtful incidents are easily rectified. Others are not.

Abuse, exploitation, harassment, bullying, and other similar types of misconduct — whether physical, verbal, sexual, or emotional — are contrary to Friends’ testimonies. Individual Friends bear responsibility in those areas; so too do Quaker meetings. Every meeting and worship group must do whatever it can to provide a safe and loving environment for everyone, as Friends seek to affirm the worth of all children of God.

Anger and frustration may result in hurtfulness which leaves physical, sexual or emotional wounds. Healing and forgiveness are possible when our hearts are opened to the transforming love that comes from the Spirit Within.

Iowa Yearly Meeting of Friends (Conservative), 2011

Each meeting is advised to do its best to prevent occurrences of abuse, exploitation, and similar forms of misconduct in any event that takes place under its auspices, and to undertake actions of both a preventive and responsive nature when it has the opportunity and/or need to do so. In addition to making every effort to assure safety in its gatherings, each meeting should be prepared to deal promptly, actively and lovingly with incidents involving misconduct. Any meeting that does not have a policy stating its expectations concerning such matters might want to consider developing and minuting such a policy, perhaps first consulting with meetings that have already done so.

Once misconduct of any sort has taken place, the meeting has an important role to play in providing an environment in which healing can occur. Friends who have harmed others or been harmed by others are likely to feel out of right relationship with the Meeting, especially if they feel it is not safe to address these matters. The work of dealing with such issues is formally the responsibility of the care and counsel committee (pp. xx–xx), but every member and attender plays a part in nurturing a trustworthy and beloved community.

Queries
1. How can our meeting assure that its practices and events are free of exploitation and harassment?
2. If abuse occurs or has already occurred in our meeting, how can we reach out to both abuser and abused? How can we foster the process of healing for those involved and for the meeting as a whole?
3. How can our meeting offer protection and support to those who have been adversely affected by abuse and other forms of misconduct? Has our meeting prepared itself with appropriate contact information in order to make referrals to professional resources if that becomes necessary?
Sources for Quotes

p. 1, “Anger and frustration may result in hurtfulness…”: Faith and Practice: The Book of Discipline of Iowa Yearly Meeting of Friends (Conservative), 2011, p. 44.