

Twin Cities Friends Meeting

Harassment, Abuse, and Sexual Misconduct Policy

*Approved October 12, 2024
at TCFM's Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business*

Policy goals

Twin Cities Friends Meeting seeks to establish and maintain a community that is safe and welcoming for all, and in which all can experience the peace of the Inner Light. This policy addresses the following goals of the Meeting:

- To prevent harassment, abuse, and sexual misconduct
- To respond affirmatively to possible incidents of harassment, abuse, or sexual misconduct
- To educate participants in our community about the Meeting's expectations for appropriate behavior

Policy limitations

- This policy is concerned with the behavior of adults in relation to other adults. The safety of children within our community is addressed in our Child Safety Policy.
- If there is an incident between youth of similar ages, the Committee on Ministry and Counsel, in consultation with the Clerks, shall determine whether this policy or the Child Safety Policy is best suited to address the situation.
- Some harassment, abuse, or sexual misconduct may violate criminal statutes or other state or federal laws. Nothing in this policy limits the ability of any person to notify or seek assistance from law enforcement authorities.

Responsible entity

The Committee on Ministry and Counsel implements this policy and updates it as needed. The policy was most recently updated in October 2024.

Situations where this policy applies

No definition can encompass all possible forms of harassment, abuse, or sexual misconduct. The Committee on Ministry and Counsel may act under this policy to address any situation in the Meeting to which it decides this policy applies.

Such situations include, but are not necessarily limited to, the following:

- Unwanted personal interactions that continue after a person has been notified that the behavior is unwelcome
- Unwanted personal interactions where the recipient has wanted the behavior to stop, but has felt unable to object directly due to differences in power, authority, social position, or status within the meeting
- Unwanted romantic or sexual approaches or advances, including unwanted romantic or sexual physical contact of any kind
- Unwanted similar approaches or advances in a pattern by a single alleged offender toward multiple victims
- Attempts to initiate personal communication or contact after a person has been notified that communication or contact is not welcome
- Any behavior that is demeaning to or discriminates against others on the basis of gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, class, age, physical or mental ability, appearance, social status, faith, or other personal characteristic
- Any suggestion that unwanted personal interactions are necessary or expected in order for a person to participate in the life of the meeting
- Any inappropriate conduct or behavior that creates an unwelcome, hostile or offensive environment for others

On the other hand, normal human interactions occasionally lead to hurt feelings or offense. Mistakes, apologies, and clear-the-air conversations are an ordinary part of daily life, and may not require action by the Committee on Ministry and Counsel. Individuals who are unsure whether a particular behavior constitutes harassment, abuse, or sexual misconduct are encouraged to consult (confidentially, if preferred) with any member of the Committee on Ministry and Counsel.

To the extent that there may be conflicts among differing values, the safety, inclusivity, and welcoming nature of the Meeting community shall be the guiding values. For example, care and ministry for a member of our community who is experiencing a mental illness cannot extend to allowing that person to make others feel unsafe or unwelcomed.

Prevention

The Meeting's primary goal is to prevent harassment, abuse, and sexual misconduct. Although this policy outlines steps for responding when such situations occur, it is best if no response is needed.

Publication

The Committee on Ministry and Counsel will publicize this policy on a periodic basis by publishing summaries of the policy in the newsletter and making presentations about the policy at times and places intended to disseminate information about the policy as widely as possible.

Fostering a respectful culture

Those who serve in positions of responsibility within the Meeting—Clerks, Ministry and Counsel members, Committee Clerks, and staff—must commit to treating others with respect and to endeavoring to create an inclusive, welcoming, and safe community. Such efforts may include:

- Living our faith by modelling the Quaker values of community and equality during worship, committee meetings, social events, and other events in the life of the Meeting
- Intervening directly or indirectly when others act in ways that could make participants in our community feel uncomfortable or unsafe
- Listening with open hearts when others express that they have been hurt or felt uncomfortable or unsafe because of the actions of someone in the Meeting
- Reporting or assisting others to report actions that may trigger the response steps outlined below
- Acknowledging when our own actions have inadvertently hurt others, apologizing when possible/welcomed, and seeking greater understanding of our own flaws to avoid causing further harm

Training

The Committee on Ministry and Counsel may periodically lead or sponsor trainings on topics such as identifying potential harassment, abuse or sexual misconduct; intervening to disrupt incidents of inappropriate behavior; the contents of this policy; or other topics that are relevant given current events within the meeting, our Twin Cities community, or the world at large.

Incident Reporting

Anyone may initiate a report of harassment, abuse, or sexual misconduct. The reporter need not have been personally involved. Reporters should contact either a Ministry and Counsel member or the Clerk of the meeting. The report should preferably be in writing.

Helpful reports will contain:

- Names of all concerned parties
- Description of the objectionable behavior, including the circumstances surrounding it
- Description of any attempt made to dissuade the alleged offender
- Description of any interventions by bystanders or others
- Consequences caused by the objectionable behavior (emotional distress, physical harm, fear of participating in meeting activities, etc.)

Incident response

When a situation or incident that may constitute harassment, abuse, or sexual misconduct is reported to the Committee on Ministry and Counsel, the Committee will take the following steps.

1. Ensure safety

If a reported situation or incident appears to be ongoing, the Committee will take immediate steps to reestablish a safe environment. For example, committee members might accompany a complainant to worship or other Quaker events, or the committee might request that two individuals in conflict attend separate meetings for worship while the Committee is gathering further information.

2. Gather information

A subcommittee formed by Ministry and Counsel (likely consisting of two or three members) will meet with:

- the person reporting the incident or situation
- the person or persons who were targeted (if not the reporter)
- any witnesses to actions or conversations
- the alleged offender(s)

The subcommittee will also, to the extent possible, seek out and review any evidence that might exist that could help establish what occurred (for example, email or text messages, cell phone videos, etc.). The subcommittee will also consider any available information about past events that suggest that the reported incident or situation is part of a pattern of behavior.

When gathering information, the subcommittee will treat what it learns with discretion, to the extent possible. However, it may be challenging for the subcommittee to investigate alleged incidents without sharing some information. Further, Ministry and Counsel members cannot prioritize confidentiality to the extent that others are placed at risk through inaction or lack of notification.

Ideally, the subcommittee will conduct and complete its information-gathering activities within thirty days of receiving a report. However, circumstances differ. In some instances, very rapid action may be called for; in others, it may be difficult to contact important individuals due to travel, illness, etc.

3. Report to the Committee on Ministry and Counsel

The information-gathering subcommittee shall report its findings to the full Committee on Ministry and Counsel; it may also recommend a course of action. If the Committee determines that harassment, abuse, or sexual misconduct has occurred, it will minute that determination and also report that determination to the Clerk of the Meeting.

4. Action by the Committee on Ministry and Counsel

The Committee on Ministry and Counsel shall take actions it views as necessary to reestablish and maintain a community that is safe and welcoming for all. The Committee on Ministry and Counsel may also decide that no action is necessary—for example, because it determines that no inappropriate behavior occurred, or because an apology was made and accepted during the information gathering phase.

Actions by the Committee on Ministry and Counsel to deal with less serious situations could include, but are not limited to:

- Directing the offending person to stop the inappropriate behavior.
- Forming a support committee to provide spiritual support to a person who has experienced harassment, abuse, or sexual misconduct.
- Forming a support committee to provide spiritual support to a person seeking to change their own inappropriate behavior.
- Facilitating a discussion between the offending person and the offended person, if both voluntarily wish to participate in such a discussion.

Actions by the Committee on Ministry and Counsel to deal with more serious situations could include, but are not limited to the following:

- Requiring the offender to stay away from the offended person.
- Setting conditions on the offender's participation in the life of the Meeting.

- Prohibiting the offender from participating in some or all Meeting functions, either until certain conditions are met, or indefinitely.
- Notifying the community of the determination and naming the offender.
- Recommending to the Meeting that an offender be released from their membership.
- Referral to law enforcement.

5. *Documentation*

The Committee on Ministry and Counsel will confidentially record information about each incident it investigates to ensure that any ongoing patterns can be discerned. In a manner consistent with the Child Safety Policy, the Committee on Ministry and Counsel will name a Designated Responder each year. The Designated Responder will ensure that these confidential documents are placed and maintained in a secure location in the TCFM office.

When the role is transferred to a new Ministry and Counsel member, the Designated Responder will notify and explain the procedure to the Ministry and Counsel member who replaces them in that role.

The Designated Responder may make a recommendation to the Committee on Ministry and Counsel regarding whether any existing documentation should be discarded as no longer relevant (for example, because a past offender has left the Meeting). Any documentation retention decision must be made by the Committee on Ministry and Counsel as a whole.

6. *Appeal*

An offender may appeal to the Committee on Ministry and Counsel for reconsideration. An offender may also appeal to the Committee on Ministry and Counsel to have restrictions lifted after demonstrating that they have made necessary changes to their behavior.

An offender may also appeal to the Clerk of the Meeting to ask that the Meeting overrule a decision of the Committee on Ministry and Counsel. The Clerk has the sole discretion to decide whether to place such an appeal on the agenda of the Meeting for Business. If the Clerk is the offender, the Clerk's Team (minus the Clerk) will receive the appeal and make the decision.