

## **A reflection on our responsibility to minimize the risk of child sexual abuse in our meetings and communities**

**By: Christel Jorgenson (Cambridge, MA) 2004**

*“Several factors have brought the issue of child safety to our Quaker meetings. Scandals in other churches have been in the news. Insurance companies are becoming more involved in setting standards in order to cover liability. We may have never given it much thought and now it seems to be important. Of course, we Quakers could be priding ourselves on “it could never happen here.” It isn’t something we like to imagine as possible. It is a hard issue to consider, for any person, for any meeting. We quite naturally resist it. After all, with our small and close-knit community, our emphasis on honesty and compassion, the peace testimony. . . don’t these give us a strong foundation for a healthy environment for our children? Yes. But it is not a guarantee. It can happen here. As well, we need to be aware of the issue because of the other environments our children find themselves in. Studies show disturbing statistics—that [one in ten children will have] experienced sexual abuse before the age of 18—and some studies show a higher percentage. Compassion for children requires that we take seriously our responsibility to minimize the risk of child abuse in our meetings and in our communities...*

*...One weekend [in 2003] I completed a four hour volunteer training program in a Catholic parish. [it felt like they were] rising from their crises with a very effective program. At the same time, it was deep-in-the-gut disturbing to hear testimonies from perpetrators and survivors. As a whole, the message was hopeful that awareness can prevent these tragedies. I asked myself if it creates an atmosphere of apprehension and suspicion—and in the end, I think it does not. Soberness about our responsibility is more my sense of it. And it does not drown out the joy. The next day in worship, I found myself cherishing our children all the more—each little wiggle, giggle, and whisper. We have the privilege of being in community with such engaging, lively spirits. We need to protect this great gift from God...”-excerpted from the Christian Education Newsletter, New England Yearly Meeting of Friends, February 2004*

### **Elements of Child Safety Policy at Friends Meeting at Cambridge (2003)**

*In hopes of supporting the work of meetings across New England in developing child safety policies and procedures that will work for their community, Chris who served as the coordinator of the New England Yearly Meeting Young Friends (high school) program for 17 years shares the elements of the child safety policy developed at Friends Meeting at Cambridge (MA). If your meeting has a resource to share, or reflections to offer on your own experiences of work regarding the development of child safety policies, practices, or procedures please share them with the clerk of the Youth Ministries Committee, or with Beth Collea, the Religious Education and Outreach Coordinator, who can add them to our collection for use by local meetings.*

“When we set out, we needed a checklist for what we needed to include. Ours looked like this:”

- 1) Raising awareness and invoking participation of the whole meeting
  - a) Brochure/s
  - b) Written materials for newsletter and weekly announcements
  - c) Information and training opportunities
  - d) Formalizing annual/semiannual child safety processes (training, screening, etc)
  - e) Providing any assistance necessary to the First Day School coordinator to carry out the policies
  
- 2) Workers with children or youth
  - a) Screening
    - i) Application
    - ii) References
    - iii) Criminal Record Check?
    - iv) Interview
  - b) Training
    - i) Written materials
    - ii) Seminars
  - c) Supervision
    - i) Oversight of workers
    - ii) Staff-to-children ratio
    - iii) Guidelines for behavior
    - iv) Check list for safety of First Day School and events (ie youth retreats, childcare at meeting retreats)
  
- 3) Physical surroundings
  - a) Sleeping arrangements
  - b) Minimizing hazards
  - c) Transportation
  
- 4) Procedures for incidents
  - a) Child revealing abuse
  - b) Observed problematic behavior
  - c) Mandated reporting
  - d) Responding to allegations
  - e) Incidents made public