



NEW ENGLAND
YEARLY MEETING
OF FRIENDS
QUAKERS

Community Safety and Abuse Prevention—Making it manageable!

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Education around abuse prevention is a critical piece of our stewardship for the children and families in our care. We can think of education as fitting in a logical sequence between our efforts to prevent abuse, on the one hand, and being ready to respond to allegations and reports, on the other. This is tender, thoughtful, vital and ongoing work. Fred Rogers was asked why he thought it was appropriate to create programming for young children about difficult topics like divorce and death. He famously responded, “If it’s mentionable, it’s manageable.”

We want to encourage and empower Friends to find their voice around Community Safety and abuse prevention. Let’s make it manageable! This work will primarily happen in our local meetings and it can take many forms. A program devoted to communicating the meeting’s strategy for abuse prevention to parents/adults is one place to start. Normalizing our commitment to community safety by weaving it in here and there throughout the life of the meeting can be very powerful. As your meeting develops its own policies and approaches, look for the basic understandings on which Friends are building their policy. Weave these in to First Day School lessons, the description of your religious education program, minutes on life in community, etc. Here is a partial list to give you a running start:

- We listen to children and take them seriously
- Children have a right to be safe from abuse or neglect
- There are some secrets it is not OK to ask a child to keep
- We care about all safety issues from accidents on the playground and in the social room to abuse prevention
- No community is immune from possible abuse and assault of vulnerable people

At all times, be mindful of the age and stage of your audience and adjust your messaging accordingly. Even with preschool-aged children, we can build a foundation for later conversations by setting in place basic understandings. For example, in a lesson on integrity and truth telling, we can note there are some secrets no one should ask a child to keep. Look for opportunities to weave in, “It is always okay to tell a trusted adult a worry.” When we celebrate God’s all enfolding love, we can underscore that each of our children is held in God’s love and it is not okay for anyone to harm them in any way. Attached is a [sample lesson](#) for children ages 4-8 on *silence* as a tool which we can use in positive or negative ways.

Education around abuse prevention is an open-ended part of our journey together as New England Friends. Our life in community is always a work in progress. Each meeting will find its own way forward with its own flavor and tone. NEYM hopes to support you and your meeting with resources and enough scaffolding to help you give shape and voice to your commitment to the safety of our children and families. Please feel free to [email me](#) if you would like more information, or would like to talk more about any of these topics.