Policy on Child Safety

The youth of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting are precious to us. We are entrusted to help them grow in the Spirit, and to grow safely, and so our way of being with youth is as important as the content of our programs. Our intention is always to create a safe and trusting environment, in order to ensure the physical, emotional and spiritual safety of our youth and youth workers. To that end, we have adopted the policy below to provide all of us with guidance for how we care for the safety of our children and youth.

Policy

Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting (OVYM) will take all reasonable precautions to ensure the safety of the children and youth at all OVYM-sponsored events. To that end, we will provide appropriate screening and training of all staff and volunteers working with children and young people (outlined below), and strive to create a loving environment where it is safe to report concerns.

It is the policy of the OVYM to follow the procedures below. This provisional policy is a work in progress, something to use while additional learning and discernment shapes future revisions. This policy and the supportive procedures apply to everyone who works with children and young people under age 18 years, whether they are 1) paid, 2) compensated by work grants or fee waivers, or 3) volunteers.

Procedures

1. All applicants for paid youth and child care positions shall provide three references to the committee clerk or other designated person. Preferably, one of the three references will come from a person within the yearly meeting and another from a person who has direct experience of the applicant's work with youth or children. Family members should not be used as references. References will be checked, and written records of reference calls kept on file with the OVYM Administrative Assistant. We are aware that references and background checks can help, but are not a guarantee of safety and could create a false sense of security.

2. All youth workers and others who will have supervisory roles (Youth Secretary, members of Youth Services or Children's Committees), and all who will have overnight responsibility for children or young people, and those who may be alone with young people, must consent to a criminal and child abuse background check prior to serving as a youth worker. The checks will be performed by the OVYM Administrative Assistant unless an applicant can provide a current background check performed by local law enforcement offices or similar database services in other states. The cost of the background check will be borne by OVYM. The OVYM Administrative Assistant will keep records of all background checks and will notify the appropriate committee contact of any concerns. The checks will be repeated every three years for continuing workers. For events when an adult and child might be isolated, such as driving a child somewhere, the Youth Services or Children's Committee

may decide that all youth workers will have a background check and unscreened volunteers will not be accepted.

3. Workers who have not undergone the more thorough screening, otherwise known as unscreened volunteers, will be accompanied at all times by a screened worker. Under no circumstances will these unscreened workers be left alone with a child other than their own.

4. All information from references and background checks will be held in the strictest of confidence. Files will be held in the OVYM office in a secure file until the known death of the worker. Access to these files will be limited to committee clerks and officers of OVYM. These files are the property of OVYM. Upon written request to the OVYM Administrative Assistant, workers shall have access to their files except for letters of reference, which are confidential and not available to the worker. The file is not available to others outside of OVYM.

5. Should a committee have a question or concern about information revealed during the screening procedures, they may discuss this information with the applicant and ask for further clarification. In the event the individual is hired or the volunteer is accepted, the committee should document their reasons in writing for overriding the detrimental information and submit to the OVYM Administrative Assistant for the worker's file.

6. All youth workers, including those who have supervisory roles (Youth Secretary, members of Youth Services or Children's Committees), those who will have overnight responsibility for children or young people (Friendly presences, parents, sponsors), and those who may be alone with young people (volunteers), shall be trained in abuse prevention prior to working with children or youth. OVYM shall provide, at no cost to the youth worker, abuse prevention training that meets the standards of OVYM's insurance company, state laws, and this policy. There will be an assessment at the end of the training to make sure participants comprehend the content and objectives of the training. Everyone working with youth needs to go through the training every three years. The OVYM Administrative Assistant will keep records of when people are due to renew their training. If someone can provide documentation of up-to-date Friends General Conference training and child safety clearance, that can suffice for training.

7. The abuse prevention training shall be coordinated by the Religious Nurture and Education Committee of OVYM. Abuse prevention training materials shall be available year round to youth workers who have met all other qualifications for work with children and youth. In addition, abuse prevention materials from the Religious Nurture and Education Committee shall be available on request to monthly meetings (who develop their own policies). The Youth Services and Children's Committees will provide additional procedures, restrictions, and guidelines to youth and child care workers as needed.

8. Any allegations of unsafe behaviors (physical or verbal abuse, harassment, or other misconduct) will be taken seriously. For the purpose of handling allegations of unsafe behaviors, the clerks of the Children's Committee, Youth Services Committee, OVYM presiding clerk and assistant clerk will serve as the Safe Child Response Team for annual sessions.

For overnight trips and other youth events, all such allegations are to be reported immediately to the Youth Secretary. Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting shall comply with all legal requirements for reporting of abuse.

Overnight trips

We have a special concern for overnight trips as there are more opportunities for potential abuse.

1. No two people should be alone and out-of-sight from others in the group at any time (minimum group size of three). Prior to overnights parents should be advised of specifically who will be with their child at night, both youth and youth workers. Adults and youth need to sign agreements of community expectations, and parents/sponsors need to sign that they have gone over expectations with their charges in advance of the event.
2. There should be at least two adults at an overnight, with a recommended ratio of one adult for every five youth. If enough adults do not volunteer or are not hired the trip shall be CANCELED.
3. Trip planners will inquire of the hosts for the overnight and plan accordingly for sleeping arrangements. Sleeping arrangements will be determined prior to the trip and parents will be informed prior to the trip.

Day Trips

1. There should be at least two adults, with a recommended ratio of one adult for every five youth. If enough adults do not volunteer or are not hired the trip shall be CANCELED.

Online Events

Screening of youth workers will be the same as for in-person events. There will be a minimum of two staff present in any on-line session or breakout group. We expect that OVYM Youth will treat each other with respect and conduct themselves following the guidelines that Youth learn at our in-person events. Youth are not permitted to take screenshots and/or recordings during any on-line event either on Zoom or on their personal device. Should any youth have a concern about unsafe behavior they should inform the Youth Secretary.

Preferred Zoom default settings:

- Cannot join before host
- Waiting room on (removed participants cannot rejoin)
- Muted on entry
- Participant whiteboard off
- Disabling screen share
- Only host can share screen
- Chat function to chat host or everyone publicly only
- Virtual background off

10. Photo and Video Likeness: Photos or videos will only be taken with the subject's consent. These will not be published in any format without permission. Any likenesses will not be used without consent, whether for OVYM promotional materials or for personal use. Impact matters more than intent.

11. This policy will be reviewed every three years by the Executive Committee in consultation with all youth committees appointed by the Yearly Meeting.

(Adapted from FGC Policy 2004, last revised 10/4/2014, current revision 3/2023)