

Bellingham Friends Meeting Guidelines for Participation by people accused, charged, or convicted of sex offenses

The Worship and Ministry Committee of Bellingham Friends Meeting, (hereinafter W&M) will hold in the Light each person who wishes to participate in Bellingham Friends Meeting and who has been accused, charged, or convicted of a sex offense. Of primary concern are the needs of the Meeting as a whole, with special attention to the safety of children and the needs of survivors of sexual assault and childhood abuse. As noted in “Meetings and (ex)offenders,” from Britain Yearly Meeting, “it is . . . important to remember that forgiveness of an individual for a particular offence can only come from three sources—God, the victim, and the offender themselves.”

Among the needs of the Meeting as a whole are:

- Respect for the sanctity of worship, the practice of waiting on the Light, and guidelines for vocal ministry.
- Commitment to living into Friends’ testimonies, which include integrity, community, simplicity, equality, and peace.
- Being willing and able to discern if one’s behavior is disruptive to the Meeting, either in worship or other practices.
- Commitment to finding unity in seeking the truth, such that individuals are willing to be open to new Light and continuing revelation.

If the person accused, charged or convicted is not willing and able to abide by these guidelines, the Meeting may not be able to accommodate their joining our community.

Again, quoting from Britain Yearly Meeting, “These guidelines are based on two major considerations:

“1. The need to find balance between our Quakerly desire to welcome everyone into our meetings and our responsibility to provide a safe place for everyone attending our meeting houses.

“2. The need for meetings to be prepared for the challenges which welcoming everyone might pose, e.g. when aware of the attendance, or proposed attendance, of an ex-offender, or the possibility of offending behavior by a member of the meeting. . . . Having an active safeguarding policy is the first step to greater accountability and providing a safer environment. Watchfulness need not be unfriendly; it includes understanding that some people may bring risks with them.”

W&M committee is responsible for discerning whether the meeting has the resources to allow an individual who has been accused, charged or convicted to participate in Bellingham Friends Meeting worship and activities.

The following considerations are crucial to that discernment:

1. Is there a way to include this individual who is accused, charged or convicted of a sexual offense without sacrificing the needs of other Friends, particularly children or Friends who are survivors of assault or abuse? Has there been accountability for injuries done to the victim and/or the Meeting? Would the individual accused, charged or convicted be willing to accommodate the needs of

victims of sexual assault or abuse, such as by attending meetings for reconciliation, attending worship at alternate times, or by accepting monitors?

2. Does the Meeting have Friends to fill needed positions, and processes in place to keep children safe, to meet the needs of the Meeting as a whole, and to nurture the spiritual journey of the offender? (Monitors will likely be needed, not only for the safety of children and the peace of mind of adult Friends, but also for the safety of the accused, charged, or convicted person, against mistaken or false accusations.) W&M committee will appoint a Receiving Group, which will be responsible for overseeing the attendance of any person accused, charged, or convicted of a sexual offense. The Receiving group will include a minimum of three members including the clerk or co-clerk of Meeting, either a member of Pastoral Care or a member of W&M (whichever the clerk or co-clerk is not on), and a member of Children's Program Committee. In addition, it may be helpful to have one or two other experienced Friends appointed to the Receiving group.

3. Does the Meeting have the means to meet the physical safety, emotional, and spiritual needs of Friends who we are aware have painful histories related to the type of offense in question? Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is common for people who have had physically or emotionally traumatic experiences. Support is one of the most effective tools available when it comes to treating the causes and symptoms of PTSD. A strong network of family and friends is crucial to the recovery process and our Meeting can play a role in this support. W&M needs to be aware that, as with most mental illnesses, no cure exists for PTSD, but the symptoms can often be effectively managed to restore the affected individual to normal functioning. The best treatment for PTSD also includes a combination of medication and therapy.^{1, 2, 3}

4. Is the person who is accused, charged, or convicted a part of our congregation or otherwise known to Bellingham Friends? Is the accuser a part of our congregation or otherwise known to Bellingham Friends? If the latter, will the accuser be able to continue attending BFM if the accused, charged, or convicted person does?

5. If the Meeting does not have the resources to accommodate a given person accused, charged, or convicted of an offense within the setting of our Meeting for Worship and other Meeting activities, can Pastoral Care Committee find individual Friends willing and able to meet in worship with that individual outside of our usual gatherings? Can Pastoral Care Committee check with regular BFM groups, such as Spirit Group or Book Group, to see if their membership would be able to accommodate the individual's participation in those groups?

6. If W&M determines that the Meeting does not have the resources to meet the needs of the whole Meeting, while nurturing the spiritual life of the accused, charged, or convicted person, can we refer that individual to another congregation that we know has a supportive program and similar theology or practices?

7. If the person accused, charged, or convicted acknowledges the essential truth of the accusation or charge, are they remorseful? Have they served their sentence through the criminal justice system, if applicable? If the person has disclosed to W&M that they are living with a diagnosed mental health condition, does it contribute to their behavior and/or their ability to take responsibility for their actions? Are they committed to practicing Friends' testimonies in the future, and healing their spiritual

life through restitution, taking responsibility for their actions, and committing themselves to healing transformation?

8. Whether the person accused, charged, or convicted acknowledges fault or claims innocence, is W&M persuaded that they are committed to Friends testimonies, including equality (among all individuals regardless of age, gender, race, etc.), integrity, peace, and community? Sexual offenses and child abuse are intrinsically a violation of Friend’s testimony on equality because they involve one person having power over another. Some people in our society have privileges that result in dominance whether or not they want it or are aware of it. Is the person in question willing to participate in educational opportunities regarding these dynamics and our testimony of equality? Have the circumstances of their life changed substantially between the time of the alleged or acknowledged offense and the present? Some things to consider might be:

a. Are they now in a stable, supportive relationship or network of relationships?

b. Have they disclosed to W&M that they are now under the care of a psychiatrist and/or therapist?

c. Are they willing to be open with W&M and their care committee (see last paragraph of this page) about the progress of their spiritual journey in the wake of this accusation, charge, or conviction?

d. If the person has been convicted and served their sentence as a sex offender, does the criminal justice system assess them as a Type I (least likely to reoffend), Type II (moderate risk to reoffend) or Type III (high risk to reoffend)? Given all available information, does W&M concur with this assessment?

e. If the person accused, charged or convicted of a sex offense was under intense stress at the time of the offense (financial, emotional or psychological), are they now supported and/or in circumstances supplying stability in their life, beyond their desired participation in BFM?

9. What was the charge, and was the person convicted of that or a lesser charge? Friends are aware that the prosecution in our criminal justice system often brings higher charges in order to induce a “guilty” plea bargain, and also that inequities in ability to hire effective legal counsel can alter the outcome of our judicial processes.

If W&M is uncertain, after reviewing these questions, they may choose to bring particulars of the case to MfWfB, with or without names (based on our Confidentiality Guidelines), to seek guidance from the Meeting. However, if W&M has unity, they are empowered by this document to make a decision about the application of these guidelines on behalf of the Meeting. If W&M or the Meeting for Worship for Business (MfWfB) determines we do have the resources to meet the needs of the Meeting as a whole, including children and adult survivors of sexual assault or harassment, and to nurture the spiritual journey of the accused, charged, or convicted person, the following agreement will be filled out and signed by the person accused, charged or convicted, clerk of Meeting, and clerk of W&M and of a representative of the Receiving Group.

¹ <https://www.psychguides.com/ptsd/treatment/>

² <https://www.bridgestorecovery.com/post-traumatic-stress-disorder/is-ptsd-curable/>

³ <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/post-traumatic-stress-disorder/diagnosis-treatment/drc-20355973>

AGREEMENT

This Agreement is made between Bellingham Friends Meeting, and a person accused, charged, or convicted of a sex offense who wishes to attend Bellingham Friends Meeting. Depending on all the factors above and any others that may be considered, some or all of these listed responsibilities may be waived as long as the safety of children and our entire Quaker community are held as the primary goal.

I, _____, (*print name*) understand that I will be attending Bellingham Friends Meeting or sponsored activities in accordance with this agreement signed by myself, clerk of W&M and clerk of Meeting, and a representative of the Receiving Group, based on our collective discernment of leadings of the Spirit, regarding the safety and health of Bellingham Friends Meeting, and its children and adult attenders. This agreement includes:

Responsibilities of the person accused, charged or convicted

1. I will arrange in advance of attendance to have an approved monitor present at all Meetings or BFM events that I attend. If I am uncertain how to proceed with that, I will contact the current clerk(s) of Meeting, W&M, and/or Pastoral Care committee for guidance. These Friends may be reached by using the Bellingham Friends Meeting Directory or by phone (360-671-1395) or email (info@bellinghamfriends.org). Pastoral Care Committee may assist in finding monitors, who are approved the Receiving Group for my care. (I understand that generally, romantic partners and family members are not preferred monitors, both because of their perceived allegiances and because the Meeting wants to offer its support to the family, rather than ask them to perform this duty for the Meeting. If there are compelling reasons for an exception to this guideline, I will submit to the W&M clerk an explanation of these reasons.) I will only attend when an approved monitor is available.

_____ Agree _____ Waived by Receiving Group

2. While participating in the BFM community, I will stay within my monitor's view at all times, including kitchen and outdoor areas, for example. When I am visiting the restroom, the monitor will assure that I have privacy. _____ Agree _____ Waived by Receiving Group

3. If I plan to visit the home of any member or attender of BFM where children under 18 may be present, the parents will be informed by me or by the Receiving Group concerning my legal status regarding the accusation, charge, or conviction of a sex offense. _____ Agree _____ Waived by Receiving Group

4. I will disclose to the Receiving Group any conditions of my release imposed by the Department of Corrections. _____ Agree _____ Waived by Receiving Group

5. I understand that monitors will report any violation of this agreement to the Receiving Group. If the Receiving Group concludes that a report is valid and that I have violated conditions of my community supervision (if any), the violation may be reported to my Corrections Officer. I accept these conditions on my participation in the Bellingham Friends Meeting for Worship or any other BFM activity.

_____ Agree _____ Waived by Receiving Group

Consequences of Violations

If I, _____, (*print name*) violate any of the conditions agreed upon above:

1. My monitor will tell me to leave and will report the violation to any member of the Receiving Group within 24 hours.
2. The Receiving Group will investigate any report of a violation. If it is confirmed beyond a reasonable doubt and if it involves rules set by the Department of Corrections (if any), then the Receiving Group will report it to the community corrections officer.
3. The Receiving Group will impose consequences as it deems appropriate for the violation, up to and including the possibility of my being required to stop attending. I will not attend any BFM activities until the Receiving Group has made a determination;
4. W&M will report on the violation and resolution at the next Meeting for Worship for Business if my status is known to Meeting as a whole. The decision to maintain confidentiality may be made by W&M and/or the Receiving Committee, in accordance with the Bellingham Friends Meeting's guidelines on confidentiality. Specifically, criminal charges and convictions that are part of the public record are not considered confidential information. The disclosure of such information may be either via MfWfB, or on a by-request basis, depending on the decision of W&M and/or the Receiving Committee. However, if the information is to be disclosed to MfWfB, the individual accused, charged or convicted will be notified in advance of that decision.

Bellingham Friends Meeting Responsibilities

1. The Receiving Group will oversee compliance by _____ (*print name*) with the guidelines outlined in this and the Receiving Group associated documents.

2. Pastoral Care committee will assist _____ (*print name*) in finding BFM attenders willing and able to serve as monitors. Romantic partners or family members of the offender are not preferred (see note above). Monitors must pass a WA State Patrol background check and be approved by the Receiving Group.

3. If applicable, the Receiving Group will remain vigilant to changes in the mental health status of _____ (*print name*). Becoming educated about mental illness is useful to all of us, and W&M, Pastoral Care and the Receiving Group are especially encouraged to seek information. Changes in mental health status may require changes in the conditions of this agreement (see "Changes to These Conditions" below).

4. The Receiving Group will ensure that monitors understand the expectations that must be met, as well as the procedure for reporting violations using an incident report.

5. A monitor will meet _____ (*print name*) when they arrive at BFM or at the location of BFM activities. _____ (*print name*) will not enter until a monitor has arrived. A new monitor may assume the responsibility by mutual agreement and by overlapping in time with the original monitor.

6. W&M committee will bring an annual report prepared by the Receiving Group regarding this contract to the BFM Business Meeting, if the status of _____ (*print name*) is

known to Meeting generally, which would have been determined by W&M under the Guidelines on Confidentiality. If the individual has given permission for contact with their therapist, the report would include a record of contacts with the therapist. If the individual is under supervision by the Department of Corrections, the report will include a record of contacts with the Department of Corrections. Regardless of whether the status is known to Meeting generally, the Receiving Group will still prepare an annual report to be brought to W&M.

Changes to These Conditions

These conditions may be modified or suspended by action of the Receiving Group, depending on their assessment of risks to Meeting safety, especially that of children, to the health of our worship, as well as to the needs of the accused, charged, or convicted person. Proposed modifications will be brought to Meeting for Worship for Business by W&M committee if the status of the person in question is known to Meeting generally. The clerk of W&M will maintain and store a record of this agreement and any changes to it in a secure location.

_____ (Person accused, charged, or convicted)

Date: _____

_____ (Clerk of Worship and Ministry)

Date: _____

_____ (Representative of the Receiving Group)

Date: _____

_____ (Clerk of Meeting)

Date: _____

Glossary

Committee: Friends do not have paid clergy. All the work of the Meeting (except for occasional contract work requiring special skills or resources not available within the membership of Meeting) is done by volunteer members and attenders of the Meeting, often in a group setting called a committee.

Committees fulfill a wide variety of needs, from care of the Meeting's finances to its social justice work to its hospitality.

Friend: A person who regularly worships with a Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends. Synonym: Quaker. Some might maintain that technically, a Friend (note capital F), has joined the Meeting as a member. However, regular attenders are also considered part of the community and are usually included in routine usage of the term.

Meeting: Friends' worshipping communities. The term "church" is not used either for our places of worship (called Meetinghouses) or for the worshipping community itself (called "a Meeting.") Thus the word "meeting" is used both to refer to the Sunday morning gathering for worship, and to the community of worshipers.

Meeting for Worship for Business or Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business (often abbreviated MfWfB): The decision-making gathering, usually monthly, at which the Meeting makes decisions about its activities, budgets, work, processes, and statements of principle.

Monitor: A Friend who agrees to accompany and stay within direct line of sight of the individual in question throughout their participation in Bellingham Friends Meeting activities, remaining mindful as to whether that individual is adhering to the individual's agreement with the Meeting.

Pastoral Care Committee: This committee is responsible for tending to the care of individual members of our worshipping community, helping when needed, setting up clearness committees when asked, and the like.

Receiving Group: A seasoned group of Friends appointed by W&M committee to oversee the participation of an individual accused, charged or convicted of a sexual offense.

Worship and Ministry committee (W&M): This committee is responsible for tending to the care, safety, and spiritual nurture of the Meeting as a whole, especially the sanctity and nurture of worship.

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