

**Dear Children's Volunteer or Staff Member,**

**Welcome to Live Oak Friends Meeting's Children's Program,**

**The safety of the children within Meeting is a responsibility of every member of LOFM. The Meeting strives to provide a safe physical environment and adequate adult supervision for our children. To provide supervision needed, it takes broad participation from members of the community, many well known and some not so well known. We will take care to get to know the people who have responsibility for the children and to provide oversight to ensure a high standard of care. We are looking forward to your participation in this service.**

**As a multi-generational community who treasures the special gifts each individual brings to our whole, we commit to actively protect the children in our care from physical, mental and emotional harm. We want all who come to Live Oak to experience the joy of participating in a safe and trusted environment. Monitoring the quality of care of our children is a primary responsibility of the Children's Religious Education Committee. It is the responsibility of parents to keep communicating with the committee to make sure the child care system is functioning well and meeting Friends needs.**

**The Children's Religious Education Committee, the Care and Concern Committee and the Clerk of Meeting are available to ensure that any concerns are addressed in a timely and effective manner.**

**The pages of this handbook provide a general overview of procedures and guide lines for all who work with the children of our meeting. Our policies are intended to create a safe environment for children, protecting children, you, and the mission of Live Oak Friends Meeting. The child safety procedures have been adopted and will be diligently enforced.**

**After you have carefully read this policy manual, please sign and return the agreement form located on the last page.**

**Sincerely,**

**Children's Religious Education Committee  
on behalf of Live Oak Friends Meeting**

## **Practices for Safe Engagement with Children and Youth**

Live Oak Friends Meeting of Houston is committed to maintaining a positive, nurturing environment that safeguards children and youth and protects all parties from misunderstandings. When creating safe boundaries, it is important to establish what types of interactions are appropriate and inappropriate in order to prevent interactions that:

- ⌚ may be inherently harmful to children or youth,
- ⌚ are the type used by child molesters to groom children or youth,
- ⌚ may create the conditions where abuse can occur more easily, or
- ⌚ may place adults at risk of wrongful accusation of abuse or neglect.

Sexual Misconduct includes:

1. Child Sexual Abuse.
2. Sexual harassment.
3. Rape or Sexual contact by force, threat or intimidation.
4. Sexual conduct that is injurious to the physical or emotional health of another.
5. Sexual Malfeasance defined as sexual conduct with a ministerial or professional relationship with a client, lay employee with a church member, committee members or lay persons.

Friends observe the following practices when interacting with children and youth under the care of the Meeting.

### **A. Basic Safety**

1. Friends keep the Meeting house a physically safe environment for children and youth by continuously monitoring potential physical hazards and addressing those hazards or requesting appropriate committees such as Children's Religious Education or Property to address them.
2. No child will be left unattended in buildings or in the green spaces during times of children's programs or activities.
3. Parents and guardians must maintain responsibility for supervising their child or youth prior to their joining Meeting activities and after they have been released from them.
4. A statement that sexual misconduct is illegal and will be not tolerated at Live Oak Friends Meeting, will be posted in the Meeting House and the Little House.

### **B. Non-Discrimination**

1. Friends respond to children and youth with respect, consideration and equal treatment, regardless of sex, race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, culture or socioeconomic status.

### **C. Affection**

1. Friends recognize the following types of positive and appropriate affectionate interactions with children and youth:

- ⌚ verbal praise;
- ⌚ handshakes, "high-fives," fist bumps, and hand slapping;
- ⌚ brief hugs (where contact is only at shoulder level and above);
- ⌚ pats on the shoulder or back;
- ⌚ pats on the head if culturally appropriate;
- ⌚ touching the hands, faces, shoulders, and arms;
- ⌚ arms around shoulders;
- ⌚ holding hands during prayer;
- ⌚ holding hands while walking with small children;
- ⌚ sitting beside small children; and
- ⌚ kneeling or bending down for hugs with small children

2. Friends do not engage in negative and inappropriate forms of affection with children and youth including:

- ⌚ inappropriate or lengthy embraces;
- ⌚ kisses on the mouth;
- ⌚ touching bottoms, chests, or genital areas other than for appropriate diapering or toileting of infants and toddlers;
- ⌚ showing affection in isolated areas such as bedrooms, closets, staff-only areas, or other private rooms;
- ⌚ occupying a bed with a child or youth;
- ⌚ any form of unwanted affection;
- ⌚ comments or compliments (whether spoken, written, or electronic) that relate to physique or physical developments (e.g. “You sure are developing,” “You really look good in those jeans”);
- ⌚ snapping bras, giving wedgies, or similar touching of underwear, whether or not it is covered by clothing; and
- ⌚ isolating the child from group activity without parental permission.

#### **D. Individual consultations with children or youth**

1. When a Friend needs to have a private conversation with a child, the conversation needs to occur in the corner of the room or just outside the room with the door open and with others in sight.
2. Volunteers or childcare employees should never be alone with a child but must work in pairs to ensure adequate oversight.

#### **E. Discipline and Punishment**

1. Friends do not use physical punishment in any way for behavior management of children and youth. No form of physical discipline is acceptable. Physical force or restraint may only be used to stop a behavior that may cause immediate harm to the individual or others.
2. Friends do not use harsh language or degrading punishment for behavior management. 3. Friends use positive language such as “Please walk” rather than “Don’t Run”.

#### **F. Alcohol and Drugs**

1. Friends do not use, possess, distribute or arrive under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs, or misuse legal drugs while participating in or assisting with programs or activities specifically for children or youth.

#### **G. Addressing Inappropriate Interactions**

1. If Friends observe actions that are contrary to these practices, they address the actor in a Friendly but direct and immediate manner to address the issue to ensure the safety of the child or youth.
2. If addressing the actor does not correct the behavior, Friends also engage the Clerk of Children’s Religious Education, the Clerk of Meeting or a member of the Care and Concern Committee to address the issue to ensure the safety of the child or youth.
3. Upon learning of actions contrary to these practices, Children’s Religious Education or Care and Concern will take immediate steps to engage those involved in a Friendly manner to ensure the safety of the child or youth and protect all parties from misunderstanding. Disciplinary procedure may range from oral or written concerns to the removal of the individual from contact with the children. Legal steps will be taken if warranted.

## **H. Reporting Suspected Abuse of Children or Youth**

1. The State of Texas requires that individuals report known or suspected abuse or neglect of children or youth to State authorities. If the abuse or neglect occurred within the State of Texas it can be reported to the Texas Child Abuse Hot Line at 800-252-5400 or to local law enforcement. Another reporting option is the National Child Abuse Hot Line is 800-4-A-CHILD (800-422-4453). These numbers as well as those for emergency assistance and the poison center will be posted in all LOFM buildings.
2. Friends will report known or suspected abuse or neglect of children or youth occurring on Meeting property to state authorities as required by state law, and to the Clerks of Children's Religious Education and/or Care and Concern.
3. Upon learning of suspected abuse or neglect of children or youth under the care of the Meeting, Live Oak Friends Meeting will take immediate steps to ensure the safety of alleged victims, and will cooperate with any investigation by civil authorities to the fullest extent appropriate. A Response Committee comprised of the Clerk of Meeting, the Clerk of Children's Religious Education, and the Clerk of Care and Concern will be responsible for all affairs related to the allegation of abuse. The Meeting's insurance company will be notified and legal counsel sought.

## **Procedures/Policies for Safeguarding Children and Youth**

Live Oak Friends Meeting is committed to maintaining a positive, nurturing environment that safeguards children and youth and protects all parties from misunderstandings.

This policy is intended to reduce the risk of abuse or neglect of children and youth under care of the Meeting. It applies to any and all Meeting employees and volunteers who work with children or youth while they are under care of the Meeting.

### **A. Screening and Selection**

1. No volunteer will be allowed to work with children or youth until the volunteer has been known to the Meeting for at least six months.
2. Any and all Meeting Personnel who work with children or youth shall be screened and selected utilizing, at a minimum, the following:
  - a. A standard application completed by the applicant that includes an authorization to conduct background checks, provide 3 character references and includes an acknowledgment that the applicant has received, read, and agrees to comply with this policy. The application will include employment and educational information from the applicant.
  - b. A criminal background check in any state where the applicant has resided during the past seven (7) years. Criminal background check results must be reviewed by the clerk of Children's Religious Education Committee. Offenses of a sexual or abusive nature disqualify candidates from service.
3. Children's Religious Education Committee may, at any time and at its sole discretion, disqualify any applicant from work with children or youth.
4. Children's Religious Education Committee must maintain confidential personnel files containing the following records.
  - a. Copies of all applications submitted, including record of the committee's decision to accept or reject applicants.
  - b. Records documenting completion of required education and training programs.
  - c. Records of complaints received regarding violations of this policy and actions taken to address those complaints.
  - d. Records will be kept for 5 years after a volunteer/employee has worked with the Children or Youth. Access to these files is restricted to the Clerk of Children's Education Committee and the Administrator if different.
5. Any youth of meeting who desire to work as a volunteer or employee of the Live Oak Children's program must be at least 14 years of age and go through the same screening process as an adult.

### **B. Education and Training Requirements**

1. Child abuse prevention education and training is required for all meeting personnel who work with children or youth before they start their work with children or youth. Children's Religious Education Committee will select appropriate training material and methods and ensure completion of required training. Training and discussion will include definition of child/sexual abuse, how to recognize sign of abuse and what to do if someone reports they have been molested. Training will be conducted on a regular schedule for all who work with children under the care of the meeting. This training will take place at least once every 5 years for continuing volunteers/employees.
2. Members of the committee responsible for the hiring/selection of people who will work with the children must complete documented training related to screening practices to identify/screen high risk applicants.
3. On-going supervision of people working regularly with children is the responsibility of the Children's Religious Education Committee, with the support of the entire meeting community. Training on abuse prevention will be offered to the meeting community to enhance our ability to protect our members and attenders.

4. Live Oak Friends Meeting's Procedures, Policies and Practices to ensure the safety of children will be posted on FriendsHouston.org, and available to the public as well as made available on meeting property.

### **C. Monitoring and Supervision of Programs**

1. Programs for infants and children six years old or younger will have procedures to ensure that children are released only to their parents or legal guardians or those designated by them. These procedures could include sign-in/out sheets.
2. Every program for children and youth must have established ratios for adults and children and must attempt to comply with those established ratios.
3. At a minimum, two unrelated adults are to be assigned to work together when working with children or youth.
4. Friends are prohibited from being alone with a child or youth or multiple children or youth where other adults cannot easily observe them.
5. Each program will develop age-appropriate procedures to ensure the safety of children and youth using restrooms.
6. When supervising or assisting private activities such as dressing, showering or diapering infants or children, Friends will remain in an area observable by other adults or work in pairs.
7. No activities with children and youth may occur in areas with locked doors. If doors are closed, the room must have windows so activities within the room can be easily visually monitored.
8. Parents or guardians must complete written permission forms before Friends transport children and youth for a meeting sponsored activity.
9. Childcare employees will be supervised by the Clerk of the Children's Religious Education Committee or another designated member of the committee.

### **D. Modeling of Practices and Enforcement of Procedures and Policies**

1. While working with children and youth under the care of the Meeting, any and all meeting personnel agree to:
  - a. model the Meeting's Practices for Safe Engagement with Children and Youth, and
  - b. enforce the Meeting's Procedures and Policies for Safeguarding Children and Youth.
2. Failure to do so could result in prohibition of future service with children and youth.

## APPLICATION TO WORK WITH CHILDREN OR YOUTH

This application is required of all persons seeking to work with children or youth under the care of Live Oak Friends Meeting, either as volunteers or employees. Please complete and sign this application. Submit it, with the attached Background Check form to the Children's Religious Education Committee for approval. We will send you a link or paperwork to have a background check done.

Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Please list 3 people and their contact information who will provide character references for you. They may not be related to you.

Please list your employment history for the past 7 years

What is your educational background? \_\_\_\_\_

### **Affirmation**

I understand that I have a moral and legal responsibility to protect children and youth. I commit myself, both in spirit and in action, to each of the following:

- ⌚ to not abuse or neglect a child or youth;
- ⌚ to do my best to prevent abuse and neglect among children and youth under the care of the Meeting;
- ⌚ to comply with and enforce Live Oak Friends Meeting's Practices and Procedures for Safe Engagement with Children and Youth;
- ⌚ to immediately report any observations of any inappropriate behaviors or possible policy violations with children or youth to the Clerks of Children's Religious Education or Care and Concern;
- ⌚ to report known or suspected abuse of children or youth to the Clerks of Children's Religious Education and Care and Concern and to State authorities in accordance with these policies and State laws.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_