

Virtual Gathering Policy and Procedures on Harassment

Friends General Conference, in keeping with Friends' historical concerns for equality and justice, is committed to providing environments for staff, volunteers, committee members, and program participants which are free of discrimination and harassment. Demeaning actions, words, jokes or comments based on an individual's gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, age or faith will not be tolerated. We also note that sexual harassment, both overt and subtle, is an illegal form of demeaning and oppressive misconduct which we want to prevent and which, if alleged, we will investigate thoroughly and fairly.

FGC Central Committee, October 1995

Friends General Conference wants the annual Gathering of Friends to be free of harassment. This policy addresses sexual harassment, racial harassment, and harassment based on sexual orientation. The policy and procedures stated in this document apply as well to the Virtual Gathering and other online programs and events sponsored by Friends General Conference.

Harassment is unwanted behavior generally involving the exercise of formal or informal power by the perpetrator over the victim. The key words are “unwanted,” and “formal or informal power,” plus the basis of the behavior is discrimination based in differences in sex, gender, race, or sexual orientation. Harassment is defined both by the feelings of the person who experiences it and by the intentions of the alleged perpetrator. What one person might consider an innocent comment or behavior could actually be experienced as harassment by another person, particularly if the alleged perpetrator persists in the behavior after the implications have been brought to his or her attention.

Does this mean that we must refrain from offering hugs to friends, or making comments about a friend's appearance? No, but we should be sensitive to the possibility that another might be made uncomfortable by such behavior. If there is any question about how another may feel, ask first (e.g. “May I give you a hug?”). This is simply part of our responsibility as members of a caring community of Friends.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU FEEL HARASSED, WITNESS OR HEAR OF HARASSMENT

1. If you feel harassed by the comments or behavior of another person at the Gathering, and you feel able, you can tell that person clearly that you find his/her behavior objectionable and ask him/her to stop it. If someone does tell you that s/he has been offended or embarrassed by something you did, please simply apologize and be mindful so as not to repeat the objectionable

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behavior. Do not argue about her/his feelings or defend your behavior. You cannot tell someone else how s/he should feel about something you say or do.

2. FGC has established a small Harassment Investigation Committee (H.I.C.) which includes a broad representation of the population of FGC. If you feel unable to confront the person, or find that he/she repeats the objectionable behavior despite your request to stop it, you may approach this committee with your concern. You may request a meeting with the “Harassment Investigation Committee” by contacting the Gathering Office or calling 267-645-9002, to speak directly with a member of this committee (see list below)*. Be sure to include your room number (when applicable) and when/how to contact you on any note. You may choose to pursue either an informal or a formal procedure for dealing with the situation.
3. If you witness or are told about a situation involving possible sexual harassment: Try to check it out with the person who appears to be experiencing the harassment; if s/he feels uncomfortable about the behavior, encourage her/him to confront it or report it. If it is impossible to talk with the person, or if the person is not prepared to make a report her/himself, yet you are convinced that sexual harassment occurred, then a report may be made directly to H.I.C.

WHAT FGC'S HARASSMENT INVESTIGATION COMMITTEE WILL DO IN RESPONSE TO A REPORTED INCIDENT OF HARASSMENT

1. Informal procedure: You may simply want an opportunity for a confidential discussion of the incident with a member of the Harassment Investigation Committee and help with how to handle it. If this discussion is sufficiently helpful, and you are able to stop or avoid further objectionable behavior, no further steps will be taken unless the committee member determines that the nature of the complaint is serious enough to warrant further action, such as a formal procedure.
2. Formal procedure: If you wish a formal investigation and more assistance in dealing with the perceived harassment you will be asked to submit a written, signed complaint. This complaint may be brief, but it should include name(s), a description of the objectionable behavior, the context, and your feelings. When such a complaint is received, two members of the Harassment Investigation Committee will meet with you in confidence, discuss the alleged harassment with you, and then proceed with a thorough investigation of the complaint. Such investigation will always include, but not necessarily be limited to, a meeting of the investigators with the alleged perpetrator. The H.I.C. will initiate the formal procedure in any case which it deems sufficiently serious. In this event, both the complainant and the alleged harasser will be notified of such a decision.
3. The investigation members of the committee will reach a decision as to the merits and gravity of the complaint and how to handle the situation. If the H.I.C. team determines that the harassment did indeed occur, possible consequences include:

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- a. Asking the harasser to acknowledge and stop the offending behavior;
- b. Requiring the harasser to stay away from the person who experienced the harassment for the duration of the Gathering,
- c. Requiring the harasser to leave the Gathering, and/or
- d. Refusing to accept the harasser at future Gatherings.

The investigating team will communicate its decision and the action taken to the individual who submitted the formal complaint and to the full H.I.C. Any decision to exclude a harasser from future Gatherings may be appealed by the harasser to the H.I.C. prior to the registration period for a subsequent Gathering.

4. Complaints will be treated with confidentiality and discretion. A brief report will be made of any formal investigation and the reports will be maintained by the General Secretary of FGC.
5. Every effort will be made to protect persons making bona fide complaints from any kind of retaliatory action.

MANAGING SERIOUS CONFLICTS NOT BASED ON HARASSMENT

Conflicts not involving harassment are normally handled through less formal means. From time to time a conflict within the Gathering might prove resistant to less formal methods, have an explosive or particularly harmful nature, and/or require the kind of investigation used by H.I.C. Under those circumstances the Conference Coordinator may refer the matter to H.I.C. for investigation and resolution.

****Members of the Harassment Investigation Committee include the presiding clerk, the clerk of LRCP and others selected from the Gathering community.**

H.I.C. members serving on the 2020 Virtual Gathering, Frank Barch, Barry Crossno, David Haines, Michelle Bellows, David Nachman, Linda Hunter, John Skinner, Marian Beane, Claire Cohen

Revised 5/20/20 for Virtual Gathering

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Revised 6/26/20 to include 2020 H.I.C. members

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