



Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee

Britain Yearly Meeting

Policy and Procedures on bullying, harassment and verbal abuse for Yearly Meeting and Yearly Meeting Gathering

This paper refers to both Yearly Meeting and Yearly Meeting Gathering: the term 'Yearly Meeting' means both.

If you are a staff member who has experienced harassment at work (not as a Friend on the bench), speak to your manager. This document applies specifically to volunteers and Yearly Meeting attendees.

Version Yearly Meeting 2025

Yearly Meeting aims to be a spiritually enriching experience where Friends build a loving and inclusive community. Yearly Meeting is a gathering held in the spirit of worship. This process applies to the whole of Yearly Meeting, including the plenary sessions held in our Quaker disciplines, Special Interest Meetings, Fringe and community events.

It is important for us all to consider what impact our behaviour and words might have on others. Friends should be mindful of the need for respect both in speaking and messaging.

“Interactions between Friends (online or in Friends House) can result in pain and distress. Be mindful of your own words and actions, and careful that you do not cause inadvertent hurt. Behaviour such as discrimination, bullying, harassment or verbal abuse are not acceptable and will not be tolerated.” Our community agreement: Yearly Meeting Gathering Arrangements Committee November

We start our journeys towards discernment from very different places and with different lived experience. We don't know someone else's personal experience, and people can feel very vulnerable when their lives and experiences, and those of people close to them, are being

discussed. We hope that this document sets out some ways to deepen our understanding of our impact and think through how we might behave.

This policy addresses any actions or behaviours that constitute discrimination, bullying, harassment and/or verbal abuse. Discrimination in this context is prejudiced behaviour directed towards individuals or groups who have protected characteristics.

This policy sets out the procedures for responding to concerns at both live and virtual events, and any associated issues arising on social media sites. The first steps in managing bullying, harassment, and verbal abuse are the actions that those responsible for sessions can take to mitigate issues. This includes private chat being switched off, having at least one other person in a session who is able to mute, and in exceptional circumstances remove a participant, preferably to a breakout room where elders or support facilitators can talk to them privately. In addition, Yearly Meeting Clerks and Elders may decide, exceptionally, to block access to the event for anyone who does not abide by Our Community Agreement.

Any reports around discrimination, bullying, harassment or verbal abuse can be made either during the event or after it.

Harassment is unwanted behaviour where the perpetrator uses their formal or informal power over the victim. It often stems from discrimination based on real or perceived differences, including discrimination by association.

Harassment is defined both by the feelings of the person who experiences it and by the intentions of the alleged perpetrator, with a focus on the consequence rather than the intent. What one person might consider an innocent comment or behaviour could be experienced as harassment by another person, particularly if the perpetrator persists in the behaviour after the implications have been brought to their attention.

In the case of a hate incident, this will be reported to the police (call 999 if you believe someone is in immediate danger). A hate incident is any behaviour which someone thinks was caused by hostility, prejudice or hatred in relation to a protected characteristic (including a perceived characteristic), as set out in the Equality Act, for example disability, gender re-assignment, race (including skin colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin) assigned sex and sexual orientation. This could include physical attacks, threat of attack, or verbal abuse or insults. Any such report can be made at True Vision <https://www.report-it.org.uk/>.

What to do if you feel harassed, or see or hear of harassment.

If you feel harassed by the comments or behaviour of another person at Yearly Meeting / Gathering, and you feel able, you can tell that person clearly that you find their behaviour objectionable and ask them to stop it.

If you feel unable to confront the person, or find that they repeat the objectionable behaviour despite your request to stop it, you should initially approach Yearly Meeting Elders with your concern. You may request a meeting with them by contacting 020 7663 1040 or ym@quaker.org.uk. Please include the subject heading "Reporting harassment" and when and how to contact you. You may choose to pursue either an informal or a formal procedure for dealing with the situation.

If you witness or are told about a situation involving possible harassment: Try to check it out with the person who appears to be experiencing the harassment; if they feel uncomfortable about the behaviour, encourage them 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, yet you are convinced that harassment occurred, then you should contact Yearly Meeting Elders. You will then be put in touch with the Elders who have specific responsibility for matters relating to this policy.

If someone does tell you that they have been offended or embarrassed by something you did, please simply apologise and be mindful so as not to repeat the objectionable behaviour. Do not argue about their feelings or defend your behaviour. You cannot tell someone else how they should feel about something you have said or done.

What Yearly Meeting [Gathering] Clerks and Elders will do in response to a reported incident.

1. Informal procedure: You may simply want an opportunity for a confidential discussion of the incident with a Yearly Meeting Elder and help with how to handle it. If this discussion is sufficiently helpful, and you are able to put a stop to or avoid further objectionable behaviour, no further steps will be taken unless the elder 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 response and more assistance in dealing with the perceived harassment you will be asked to submit a written, signed complaint, to the Convenor of Yearly Meeting Elders, using the contact form on the Yearly Meeting Planner. This complaint may be brief, but it should include name(s), a description of the objectionable behaviour, the context, and your feelings. When such a complaint is received, a Yearly Meeting Clerk and Elder will form an investigative committee. This means that they will meet with you in confidence, discuss the incident with you, and then proceed with a thorough investigation of the complaint. Such investigation will always include a meeting of the investigators with the alleged perpetrator.
 - i. The investigative committee will be formed by the Conveners of the Elders appointing an Elder and consulting the Clerks on which Clerk will be part of the group.
 - ii. Yearly Meeting Clerks and/or Elder who meet with the complainant will initiate the formal procedure in any case which they deem sufficiently serious. In this event, both the complainant and the alleged harasser will be notified of such a decision. In situations of wider significance, such as reputational damage, a hate crime, persistent and/or calculated harassment etc the Recording Clerk will be part of the investigation committee.

3. The committee will reach a decision as to the merits and gravity of the complaint and how to handle the situation. If they determine that the harassment did indeed occur, possible consequences include:

- i. Asking the harasser to acknowledge and stop the offending behaviour;
- ii. Requiring the harasser to stay away from the person who experienced the harassment for the duration of the Yearly Meeting [or: the duration of the event]
- iii. Requiring the harasser to leave the event, and/or
- iv. Refusing to accept the harasser at future Yearly Meeting / Gatherings.

The investigating committee will communicate its decision and the action taken to the individual who submitted the formal complaint and to the Yearly Meeting Clerks and Elders. Any complaints about decisions should be made and dealt with using the Britain Yearly Meeting complaints procedure at <https://www.quaker.org.uk/contact-us>

4. Complaints about abuse will be treated with confidentiality and discretion. A brief report will be made of any formal investigation and the reports will be given to the Recording Clerk and an overall record will be maintained by the Safeguarding Officer on MyConcern.

5. Every effort will be made to protect persons making bona fide complaints from any kind of retaliatory action.

Managing other conflicts

Conflicts in meetings do not necessarily involve harassment, bullying or verbal abuse. Guidance on handling conflict in meetings is provided in Qf&p 10.21 – 10.24. Yearly Meeting Elders are responsible for addressing conflicts at Yearly Meeting.

External contacts

These may be used by those receiving complaints to direct the individual affected to specialist support. If you share the details of external contacts, then depending on the context you may wish to talk through how to cover tracks online, information can be found here

www.womensaid.org.uk/cover-your-tracks-online/

General • [Ask the Police](#) • [Crimestoppers](#) (reporting crime) • [Equality Advisory and Support Service](#) • [Samaritans](#) (08457 909090 / 020 7734 2800), 116 123, email: jo@samaritans.org • [Shout](#) 58258 • [Stop Hate UK](#) (all forms of hate crime and discrimination) • [Victim Support](#) (victims of crime) • [National Stalking Helpline](#) (support for anyone experiencing stalking) • [Family Lives](#) 0808 800 2222 and an online chat function Mon-Fri 1:30pm to 9pm.

Domestic abuse • [The National Domestic Violence Helpline](#) in England on 0808 2000 247, in Wales on 0808 801 0800, in Scotland on 0800 027 1234. This is run in partnership with Women's

Aid and Refuge. • [Men's Advice Line](#) on 0808 801 0327. • [National LGBT Domestic Abuse Helpline](#) on 0800 999 5428 • See also [Imkaan](#)

Sexual abuse including rape • [Rape Crisis](#) (rape and sexual abuse) • [NAPAC](#) (support for survivors of childhood sexual abuse for all genders) • [Survivors UK](#) (male and non-binary survivors of rape and sexual abuse) • [Mankind](#) (support for men who have been sexually abused) • see also [Imkaan](#)

Female specific • [Solace Women's Aid](#) (0808 802 5565 / advice@solacewomensaid.org) • [Women's Aid](#) • [Rights of Women](#) (free and confidential legal advice for women)

Black, Brown and people of colour related • [Ashiana](#) (Asian women's refuge for South Asian, Turkish and Iranian women) • [The Monitoring Group](#) (racial harassment and abuse) • [Southall Black Sisters](#) (BME women's rights and advice) • [Imkaan](#) (provides full list of organisations supporting BAME women survivors of sexual and domestic violence)

LGBT related • [Galop](#) (LGBT+ anti-violence charity) • [Switchboard](#) (LGBT+ helpline) • [TransUnite](#) (find a trans support group near you)

Disability related • [Mencap](#) (the voice of learning disability) • [Mind](#) (mental health) • [Respond](#) (support for children and adults with learning disabilities who have experienced abuse and/or trauma for all genders) • [DeafHope](#) (support for Deaf people experiencing domestic abuse)

The original source of this document is the Friends General Conference Virtual Gathering Policy and Procedures on Harassment and is used with thanks.

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