

## **CARING FOR OUR PERSONAL INTERACTIONS AT YEARLY MEETING GATHERINGS**

We sometimes refer to New York Yearly Meeting as a beloved community. Our sessions are places where Friends from many areas of the yearly meeting have an opportunity to come together for worship, business, spiritual inspiration, and play. We also expect that Friends will develop relationships across the divides of geography, gender, age and point of view. Here are some notes that may help all sessions attendees remember that appropriate boundaries help relationships flourish.

An *adult friendship* implies reciprocity around a meeting of emotional and social needs and information sharing. Adult friends might share their life adventures, as well as their vulnerabilities and areas where they feel their own personal growth is needed. Adult friendships may be between similar or different persons, and their power and control may be balanced with or without explicit negotiation. The relationship may be left by either party voluntarily.

In an *adult-youth friendship* the boundaries are different. Power and control are inherently with the adult. The youth should be able to rely on the adult for support and for recognizing when the interaction is blurring boundaries. Having a conversation that would cause the youth to worry about the adult or to feel engaged in the adult's personal struggles compromises the ability to have healthy boundaries. A healthy adult-youth friendship is not meant to fulfill an adult's needs for emotional connection, or for physical affection.

*Touch* is an important part of our community. Displays of affection are encouraged but not forced. These may include arms around the waist or shoulders, kisses on the cheek and hugs. Not everyone is comfortable with touch, so be sure to check with the recipient before using these gestures!

Behavior that leads to someone feeling uncomfortable or threatened may be difficult to recognize in ourselves and for the recipient to express or address. If you aren't sure you understand how an interaction seems to have gone awry, or wonder about what might be inappropriate behavior in a given context, speak to someone you trust, a leader of your meeting, a JYM staff member, or a member of the Circle of Care and Concern (see their posted introduction at Summer Sessions 2016).

In case of suspected child sexual abuse the Yearly Meeting has a protocol and an Abuse Investigation Team (AIT) to respond to allegations, and to care for an alleged victim and an alleged abuser. An allegation should be reported immediately to one of the four members of the AIT—the NYYM General Secretary, the NYYM Assistant Clerk, and two counseling professionals who are named each year. The information will be treated as confidentially as possible, and abuse reporting may be required by law.

We share these thoughts for your consideration, in friendship  
The Liaison Committee of New York Yearly Meeting, July 2016  
With input from the Summer Sessions 2015 Abuse Investigation Committee,  
the Powell House youth directors, and worked on further by a wider circle of Friends