

OVYM Sexual Misconduct Policy (draft 1)

Notes:

- This policy statement is a work in progress, and the Task Force on Sexual Misconduct will continue to develop it further, based both on our own research and deliberations and on feedback from OVYM Friends.
- This policy document refers to a training program that OVYM does not yet have. We will research this and develop a training program for those responding to an allegation of sexual misconduct.
- Resources – the list included in the policy statement is incomplete. The Task Force will continue to collect resources to help Friends understand and respond to sexual misconduct. We welcome suggestions.

OVYM Sexual Misconduct Policy

The Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends holds as the basis of its faith the belief that divine truth and the gift of God's presence are available to all people in all ages. The indwelling presence of God implies the equal worth of all members of the human family and the capacity in all to discern spiritual truth and to hold direct communion with the Divine Spirit.

What binds us together as a spiritual community is... our sense of a common journey on a shared path, seeking the guidance of the Light. Our diversity strengthens us as we walk this path of love, compassion, and justice.

-- OVYM *Faith and Practice*

Within our meetings we come to know and care deeply for each other as we move through life's passages together. As in families and intimate groups, however, we inevitably step on each other's toes, intrude on another person or feel intruded upon, experience everything from everyday slights to more serious violations. OVYM has created this policy to help Friends deal specifically with sexual misconduct after our yearly meeting was asked to deal with an allegation of sexual assault. We offer this policy and accompanying Education Guidelines as an invitation to explore this difficult territory together.

The OVYM Sexual Misconduct Task Force presents this policy as a first step in developing our ability to respond to allegations of sexual misconduct. Sexual misconduct is a complex issue, and for a host of reasons we may find it difficult to address. For example, the issues and dynamics involved may be new to our awareness, or thinking about sexual abuse of another person may be painful. We are not accustomed to discussing sexual behavior openly, or we worry we are violating another person's privacy, etc. As our awareness grows, we may recognize ways to develop this policy further. We encourage our quarterly and monthly meetings to adopt similar policies.

Though usually hidden, sexual misconduct is a common occurrence in our culture, and Friends are no exception. Sexual misconduct is a violation of the indwelling presence of the Light in both the target and the perpetrator and thus of our testimonies. It can be hard to believe that it happens in our community. A recent allegation of sexual assault in one of our meetings, however, and a Friend's admission of sexually inappropriate behavior has made us realize that sexual misconduct happens right here in OVYM. Once we became aware of this incident, nine women spoke up at our annual sessions to say they, too, had experienced sexual misconduct.

Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting recognizes that sexual misconduct harms our communities by disrupting feelings of safety and harmony. We commit to assist monthly meetings to understand and actively address the problem and educate ourselves to create a healthy and respectful culture.

This policy applies to interactions between adults 18 years and older at Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting events.

Background and impact of sexual misconduct

1. Sexual misconduct encompasses any unwelcome behavior of a sexual nature that is committed without expressed, enthusiastic consent or committed by force, intimidation, coercion, or manipulation.
2. Sexual misconduct includes but is not limited to sexual assault, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, and sexual intimidation.
3. Sensitivity to sexual misconduct may vary among people and between generations, but the critical factor is the absence of enthusiastic consent.
4. Sexual misconduct can occur independent of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.
5. Sexual misconduct may vary in its severity and consists of a range of behaviors or attempted behaviors.
6. Sexual misconduct can occur between strangers or acquaintances, including people involved in an intimate or sexual relationship.
7. Sexist cultural norms and power differences between people (e.g. men and women, older and younger, boss and employee) are factors that enable sexual misconduct.
8. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one woman in three will experience sexual violence in her lifetime. (Because many abuses go unreported, the true number of violations women and girls suffer is likely much higher.)
9. Therefore, it is very possible that the persons involved in any reported incident may have experienced previous sexual trauma.

Reporting

- Establish a group of trained Friends to whom a report/allegation can be made.
- Reporting can be structured to provide a path toward healing by including opportunities to share verbally and non-verbally factual information and emotional feelings.
- Reporting requirements – in some states one is required to report allegations of sexual misconduct between adults, under certain circumstances. Check your state regulations. If you have a local or statewide organization dedicated to issues of domestic violence, rape, or abuse, they can provide information, advice, and speakers.

When an allegation is made

- As Friends we seek the guidance of the Light and to follow a path of love, compassion, and justice.
- Because sexual misconduct often happens with no witnesses other than the individuals involved, it can be difficult to establish definitively what occurred.
- The accuser, accused, and all people involved should be treated with respect and offered support. Perpetrators of sexual misconduct should be held lovingly accountable for their actions.

Investigation See Appendices A and B, below

The investigation should be initiated and conducted as quickly as possible after the accusation is received.

Treatment of the accused If Friends feel that the presence of the accused threatens the safety of the meeting, he or she will be asked not to attend meeting activities. Friends may offer to hold worship with the accused in a separate setting.

Resources (This section under construction)

The Sexual Misconduct Task Force will provide paper copies of resources for Friends who are unable to access the internet.

RAINN – the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network www.rainn.org This website provides information on various forms of sexual misconduct, a hotline, and a live chat feature.

Video – consent is like tea: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQbei5JGiT8>.

See: “The role of reconciliation and forgiveness,” which includes “the seven elements of justice making” found online at: <https://survivorsawakenthechurch.com/tag/marie-fortune/>.

Appendix A

Procedures following a report of sexual misconduct

These procedures have been developed by the OVYM Task Group on Sexual Misconduct. The Executive Committee of OVYM encourages the reporting of harassment and misconduct.

Because these incidents involve high emotions, these procedures are designed to assist clerks of committees and monthly meetings to have an established procedure to follow to ensure that such charges are taken seriously and investigated thoroughly. The following procedure has been adapted for use at OVYM events. In addition, Monthly Meetings are encouraged to use this form to investigate incidents that are brought to their attention. Should a Monthly Meeting desire assistance in responding to such an incident, OVYM's Religious Nurture and Education Committee, tasked with pastoral care of the Yearly Meeting, has trained members who are available for consultation or accompaniment. Contact _____.

NOTE: It is most important that clerks or other committee members who undertake an investigation of misconduct have received training from OVYM. Historically, secrecy and silence have ensured that many of these accusations are not fully investigated. Perpetrators have attacked the credibility of their victims, and marshaled arguments that include denials and elegant rationalizations. (See: "The role of reconciliation and forgiveness," which includes "the seven elements of justice making" found online at: <https://survivorsawakenthechurch.com/tag/marie-fortune/>). Care must be taken to ensure that the accused individual does not attack the character of the person making the accusation. It may be necessary to require individuals to refrain from events until the investigation is complete. Full details of these steps are explored at length in the training.

Providing Support

As important as this investigation process is, the person making the accusation must also be supported emotionally, spiritually, and socially. We suggest that different Friends undertake the tasks of a) conducting the investigation and b) providing support. In consultation with the person who has experienced trauma, seek outside help as appropriate (RN&E is available for consultation through this process: see contact, above).

1. The target of sexual misconduct is encouraged to file a confidential, written report of the incident. [see Appendix B below]
2. At least three individuals who have received training in responding to sexual misconduct allegations review the accusation. They then establish contact with the individual who has been accused of misconduct. A verbal interview is conducted, with notes taken. If desired, the accused may make a written report to add to the interview.
3. The person who made the initial report accusing misconduct should be advised that the above steps have been taken. As they receive support and possible counseling, they

should also be advised not to discuss the complaint with members of the meeting not directly involved in the investigation.

4. The investigation may include interviewing any witnesses, relevant documents, and producing a final report detailing findings and recommendations.

5. Upon being advised of the investigators' findings, The Clerk, Assistant Clerk, and members of Religious Nurture and Education determine any action required, which may include preventative and corrective action.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is required to properly investigate an incident and to offer appropriate support to all parties involved. The balance of ensuring confidentiality while promoting a transparent process to combat secrecy and denial is a delicate one. Investigators and clerks are encouraged to seek assistance from RN&E members from whom they received training on this issue, as necessary.

Monitor and Review

The investigators, clerks, and members providing support to the target of misconduct should establish with that individual their preferred methods and frequency of contact in the ongoing process of healing.

Record Keeping

Records of the initial complaint, the investigation process, and any decisions and steps taken should be kept.

APPENDIX B

Form for reporting an incident of sexual misconduct

The purpose of this report is to initiate an investigation around an alleged incident(s) of sexual misconduct involving adults 18 or over, occurring at an Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting event.

DIRECTIONS: Please complete this report and forward it in a sealed envelope marked PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL to the Clerk of Religious Nurture and Education.

A formal, confidential investigation will be initiated upon receipt of the completed/signed report. Drawings or other non-verbal forms of expression may be preferred forms of expression.

Date: _____ Time: _____

Location: _____

Name of individual(s) directly involved in the incident:

Witnesses: _____

Description of the Incident (use additional page(s) if necessary):

Can you express the impact this conduct has had on you, as you understand it at the present time?

Recommendations (if any):

Reported by (please print):

Report received by:

Date of Report:

Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting takes every complaint of harassment or misconduct very seriously. A person making a complaint is encouraged to provide as much information and detail as he or she can to assist the Yearly Meeting in handling the complaint.

Retaliation against an individual for reporting an incident is strictly prohibited.

Please note that a deliberately false or malicious complaint is considered to be a serious matter.