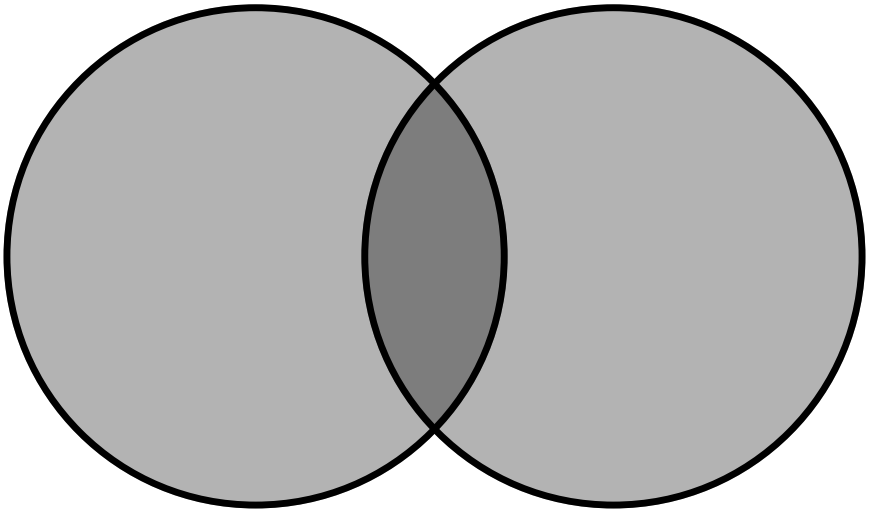


# Maintaining boundaries

A guide for individuals on avoiding  
and preventing sexual harassment



*Advices & queries 22*

Remember that each one of us is  
unique, precious, a child of God.



# Balance and boundaries

## **What are the Quaker standards in our dealings with others?**

We need first to be clear on our agreed boundaries of what is acceptable. Beyond them, there are unwelcome, inappropriate forms of sexual behaviour which are considered to be an affront to human dignity. These range from sexual harassment to sexual assault. It is possible to harass without intending to do so, perhaps without even being aware of it.

It can often occur where there is a clear imbalance of power, although it can also arise between peers.

## **What is unacceptable sexual behaviour?**

- Unwelcome remarks, jokes, teasing, innuendo, language or gestures
- Sexual exhibitionism, including carelessly seductive behaviour
- Unwanted touching or closeness, including unwanted hugs or patting and other unwelcome physical contact
- Pressure to spend time together
- Demands or pleas for sexual favours.

## **Ways you could deal with unwelcome attentions**

If possible, make it clear that such behaviour is unwelcome and unacceptable. Say 'NO'.

You may wish to speak to someone you can trust: a friend, a facilitator, an elder or an overseer. The old saying 'a trouble shared is a trouble halved' has much to be said for it.

Rest assured that anything you say will be treated as confidential, unless anyone (you or another person) is at risk of harm. If this is the case, the appropriate authorities must be informed, and it will be necessary to discuss with you how this will be done. No action will be taken without your knowledge.

Remember that by reporting the incident, you may prevent others being harassed by the same person.

## **Other action that may be taken**

The meeting, or the organisers of the day or residential event, will have already drawn up a list of basic principles for dealing with such issues.

The person to whom you report the incident will try to get to know the people involved in order to reduce the risk of misunderstanding or unfairness. At the same time she or he will try not to underestimate the problem.

He or she will assess (perhaps with a colleague, but always in confidence and with your permission) what help is required and who should give it, and will do their best to make sure that the offending behaviour ceases. Careful listening and a sense of support may be all that is needed.

If this is not sufficient, help will be given to work out and initiate an appropriate course of action.

There will be a follow-up discussion, if you wish it. Confidentiality will be maintained.

“Guided by the Light of God within us and recognising that of God in others, we can all learn to value our differences in age, sex, physique, race and culture. This enables mutual respect and self-respect to develop, and it becomes possible for everyone to love one another as God loves us. Throughout our lives, we see ourselves reflected in the facial expressions, verbal comments and body-language of others. We have a responsibility to protect each other’s self-respect.”

*Quaker faith & practice 23.33*

This text and the companion leaflet *Maintaining safe communities: information and guidance for Quaker meetings on dealing with sexual harassment* can be downloaded from [www.quaker.org.uk/resources-eldership-and-oversight](http://www.quaker.org.uk/resources-eldership-and-oversight) in a format that can be photocopied as needed.

Copies can also be obtained from Quaker Life. Email [qladmin@quaker.org.uk](mailto:qladmin@quaker.org.uk) or telephone 020 7663 1143.

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