

**Policy on Transitions Process between Pacific Yearly Meeting's
Children's Program and Junior Yearly Meeting (Teen Program)
And Background Details
March 2016**

Note: A near-final draft of this was presented by an ad-hoc committee (listed below) to Representative Committee in March 2016.

Policy Starting PYM 2016:

The process

Age 13 will be considered a "choice year" for young Friends, with permission of their parents/guardians. This means that a Friend who will be age 13 during annual session may choose to register for either Children's Program or JYM, *without having to get express permission from either program*. This will need to be made clear in the registration process. (Note, however, that CP and JYM reserve the right to work together to determine if a particular Friend -- of any age -- is better served by one program or the other.)

Normally, children 12 and under will participate in the Children's Program, and children 14 and over will participate in JYM, ***unless* they have been through the following negotiation process**. Deadlines for requests for exceptions will be 6 weeks prior to the event (and the earlier they are requested the better). If a request coming in after the deadline cannot be easily resolved by the above process, the default answer will be that the child will be placed via the basic age guideline.

Children who want to participate in JYM before the usual cutoff (i.e., at age 12 or under) may ask JYM (via their parent/guardian, by the deadline) to be included in JYM. The JYM adult clerk (or their designee) will discuss this with the child and/or parent/guardian, posing queries to get at the root of what needs the child/parent/guardian have that they believe will be met by JYM, as well as any questions or concerns. If the child has participated in Children's Program in the last 2 years, the JYM adult clerk (or designee) will also ask the Children's Program clerk (or designee) for input about readiness for JYM. The JYM clerk/designee may also ask for input from a reference such as a Friend in the child's home Meeting. The ultimate decision whether to accept the child into JYM will be made by a JYM subcommittee drawn from the JYM adult and teen clerks. *For this to work, the receiving program needs to feel empowered to say no, if need be.*

Youth who want to participate in Children's Program after the usual cutoff age (i.e., at age 14 or older) may ask CPC (via their parent/guardian, by the deadline) to be included in CP. The CPC clerk (or their designee) will discuss this with the child and/or parent/guardian, posing queries to get at the root of what needs the child/parent/guardian have that they believe will be met by CP, as well as any questions or concerns. If the child has participated in JYM in the last 2 years, the CPC clerk (or designee) will also ask the JYM clerk (or designee) for input. The CP clerk/designee may also ask for input from a reference such as a Friend in the child's home Meeting. The ultimate decision whether to accept the child into CP will be made by the CP committee or subcommittee appointed at the CPC's discretion. *For this to work, the receiving program needs to feel empowered to say no, if need be.*

If after the start of Annual Session the child/parent/guardian feel their needs aren't being met by the program they are in, they should meet with their current program's adult committee clerk (or

designee, ideally a committee member or coordinator rather than a teacher or FRAP) to discuss how to meet the child's needs. If, based on that meeting and other efforts, a change in program enrollment seems needed, the clerk/designee and parent/guardian will contact the clerk/designee of the other program to find a way forward. *For continuity and for the sake of minimal disruptions to the sense of community within each program, changing programs mid-session should be rare and is strongly discouraged. Within reason, every effort will be made to adjust the child's original placement program to facilitate their comfort and enjoyment. Only after trying out some program modifications will a move be considered between the two programs. The initial program should do its best to make reasonable adjustments and accommodations to meet the needs of their participants, and both the initial and potentially receiving programs need to feel empowered to say no, if need be.*

Children's Program Committee and JYM Committee are asked to record and share such situations with each other and the Youth Programs Coordinator for incorporation into future programming decisions.

Registration

Registrars need a clear guideline on how to place children and a clear directive on to whom to talk if a child registers for a non-usual program placement for their age. Their first point of contact should be with the adult clerk of the relevant committee.

Parent/guardians will be provided program descriptions and placement guidelines with the registration material along with contact information for the clerks of the programs.

We would like the registrars to provide CPC and JYMC access to the registration database (or if that is not possible, then regularly updated registration reports) at least weekly starting 8 weeks before the event, and daily as any registration information changes during the week leading up to the event. If a registration comes through with a non-standard program choice, we would like the Registrar to highlight it for both programs, and the programs will follow the guidelines herein.

If conflicts arise...

An ad hoc committee consisting of the JYM Adult Clerk(s), JYM Teen Clerk(s), CPC Clerk(s), and CP Coordinator make a decision, supported by the YPC, YPCC Clerk, and/or a member of M&O if needed.

When concerns arise they should be brought to the related committee clerk(s), and clerks should communicate directly with each other. *(Staff from either program should not go directly to the other program's staff with concerns.)*

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Appendix

Ad Hoc Committee

Alyssa Nelson, YPC (Convenor)
Jim Summers, YPCC Clerk
Sally Kingsland, M&O Liaison to Children's Program Committee
Chamba Cooke, Children's Program Committee Clerk
Keenan Lorenzato, Outgoing Children's Program Coordinator
Nate Secrest, Incoming Children's Program Co-Coordinator
Kylin Navarro, M&O Liaison to JYM
Steve Leeds, JYM Adult Co-Clerk
Erika Tarabini, JYM Adult Co-Clerk
Maya Price, JYM Co-Clerk
David Shaw, JYM Co-Clerk
Rose Nadis, JYM Co-Clerk
Diego Navarro, Presiding Clerk (Ex-officio)

Friends who have questions or ideas about anything in this document please contact Sally Kingsland (M&O) and Alyssa Nelson (YPC).

Problem and Purposes

Difficulties arose at PYM Annual Session 2015 regarding the transition of children from the Children's Program (CP) to Junior Yearly Meeting (JYM). Different people used different processes for discussing, negotiating, and implementing choice of program for 11, 12, and 13 year old children which led to some confusion, distress, and conflict for a number of Friends. Some of this difficulty and confusion has been going on for at least a few years, and the larger question of programming for middle school aged children has been of concern for many years. Underlying the difficulties in program placement seems to be that processes have been unclear so people have taken different routes and ended up upsetting each other. This document therefore includes strategies for both process and outcome.

Note that a somewhat similar challenge has arisen from time to time regarding transitions out of JYM and into Young Adult Friends. While this proposal does not specifically address that issue, it may contain some relevance to it.

In addition to a strategy (new policy) for how to move forward, this document has an appendix that includes a summary of the history of this conflict; descriptions of the problem, challenges, and opportunities as we understand them; explanation of the process of creating this document; and notes about the various ideas we heard. These varied, sometimes seemingly conflicting points were all taken into consideration in framing the proposal.

In considering varied possibilities, concerns, and hopes, the ad hoc committee appointed for this purpose brought this proposal to Children's Program Committee (CPC) and Junior Yearly Meeting Committee (JYMC) for approval. Once united, we asked the Registrars to work with the Youth Programs Coordinator and the CPC and JYMC adult clerks to include the necessary questions and

information in registration materials that will allow the youth, parents, and our programs to make appropriate placements and have time to plan accordingly.

This will be for a trial year in 2016 and can be adjusted for 2017 and beyond as needed.

Discernment Process for Creating a Recommendation

In Fall 2015, an ad hoc committee was formed by the Presiding Clerk and M&O Liaisons with input from key youth-serving Friends to hear concerns and propose guidelines for how children are placed in the various programs at Annual Session 2016. It is hoped that the process can be evaluated, improved, and continued into the future. The **ad hoc committee** bringing forward these recommendations included the **PYM Presiding Clerk, adult Clerks of both Children's Program Committee (CPC) and JYM Committee (JYMC), JYM Co-Clerks (teens), outgoing and incoming Children's Program Coordinators, Youth Programs Coordinator (YPC), Youth Programs Coordinating Committee Clerk (YPCC), and Ministry & Oversight Committee (M&O) liaisons to both the Children's Program and JYM.**

Also consulted were some teachers of the Children's Program, former CPC clerks, some JYM committee members and Friendly Responsible Adult Presences (FRAPs), some parents, and some youth from JYM and CP.

The M&O Liaison to CP, the Youth Programs Coordinator, and the Presiding Clerk worked on assembling the pieces to present to the ad hoc committee, which then met to discern a proposal to present to CP and JYM for review and approval.

History

The placement of individual young Friends into youth programs, as well as the existence or lack of a middle-school 'program' per se, has varied over the years. In recent years, 13 has typically been the age at which Friends enter JYM (and is also the typical transition age for SCQM and CPQM teen programs). At the last publishing of PYM's Faith & Practice in 2001, the recorded practice was that "Junior Yearly Meeting (JYM) is composed of Friends of junior high and high school age" (p. 170) and that "the Children's Program Committee is responsible for coordinating an educational program and activities for infants and children up through sixth grade" (p. 180). In the early 2000s, some parents and committee members created a middle school program because they did not want their tweens and young teens to participate yet in the JYM of that time period, while their children had outgrown the standard children's program of that time. The JYM of today has evolved and resolved many of the issues that parents were concerned about in the past. Some parents/guardians still have concerns about their young adolescents being in the same group as 17-18 year olds, who are at a significantly different stage of development, while other parents/guardians specifically want their young adolescents to be in the group with older youth.

Regardless of (or despite) the creation of a middle school program, there have been some young adolescents and their parents/guardians who have chosen to participate in JYM over the last 15 years. Meanwhile, some youth old enough for JYM have chosen to stay extra time with the Children's Program. At times the programs have been designed such that older children could participate with JYM for discrete activities and have a sort of flow between the programs. All along, it has been unclear exactly who gets to decide what and how.

Youth and parents/guardians have expressed various reasons for their preferred program choices, for example: perceived 'fit' with the style/format of one program over another, a sense of belonging with a particular peer group or cohort, or better relationships between the young Friend and adults in a particular program. Some of these same reasons for choosing a program for one young Friend have been pointed to as the 'cause' of difficulty for other individuals or the programs. Both CP and JYM have expressed a sense of 'losing out' when particular Friends with leadership and other skills or qualities are placed in one program instead of the other.

Rationale

Of all the recommendations we heard, the rationale for choosing a non-firm process is that there are too many known exceptions and that rigidity does not seem in keeping with Friends' recognition of the guidance of Inner Light or continuing revelation. Numerous Friends have told us that if they or their child were told there was no exception to firm age- or grade-based program placements, it is likely that that family/child would choose not to attend at all. Because this opting-out would coincide with the usual timing that young Friends are at risk of leaving Friends altogether (adolescence), we would rather consider accommodating varied needs than risk losing their participation entirely.

Practically speaking, with the numbers of participants in each program being rather small in recent years (~15-20 for JYM including an age span of about 5 years, and 25-30 for CP including an age span of 12+ years) there is not critical mass to effectively absorb outliers who are forced by a strict guideline to be in one program over the other, such as may exist in larger programs like FGC. The reason we recommend that the receiving committee/program make the initial decision on accepting a Friend outside the usual age range (rather than the other program releasing them) is that we trust that the child/parent/guardian has a reason for requesting a certain placement that deserves to be considered. It is also more streamlined than asking JYMC and CPC to come to unity on each individual when their energy needs to be focused mainly on preparing for their programs, not engaging in a mandated unity or conflict resolution process.

To minimize/optimize the number children/parents/guardians asking to move up to JYM before they normally would, a careful review of programming for middle schoolers within CP, including input from middle schoolers themselves, will be undertaken. The goal is to create a program that most middle schoolers will not want to leave early, one with plenty opportunity to think for themselves and be treated as nearly-teens, as compared to aching to get out of CP without fully knowing what they'd be going into. CP has heard increasing requests for more Quaker elements in its curriculum and classroom culture. One option is to create a middle school program that is a 'light' version of JYM or a 'hybrid' version of CP and JYM in terms of youth leadership and decision-making, in a developmentally appropriate manner; such models have been tried in the past and could be drawn upon. As it is commonly understood that there is a spectrum of emotional, mental, and physical developmental stages for middle school aged youth, middle school programming must be different from elementary, and there must be understanding (and exceptions) that welcome and allow for great diversity and variability during adolescence, including but not limited to program choice.

In our discernment process, this ad hoc committee spent a considerable portion of time on whether to use age or grade (or both) as the placement marker. It became clear that there are pros and cons to each of these options, a number of which are mentioned in the appendix. Though it might be most useful to provide a list of abilities a Friend should have in order to be in JYM or CP, that seems too complicated and has the potential for unintended negative consequences (though written and other information about the programs are available). Friends on the ad hoc committee with

experience in education gave some input from their perspectives, for example that unlinking age from grade can give respite to youth who have been held back grades but are socially at or above typical age level. Through this discussion, age came to be seen as slightly simpler and good enough given that we now will have a clearer process for handling exceptions.

A query, "which age is appropriate?" and a concern about pushing to end childhood too soon or too quickly prompted us to consider a choice year at age 13, allowing more flexibility since adolescence doesn't follow neat age breaks. Structurally, an explicit choice year will likely also encourage more conscious choosing, and it respects that childhood is an important time and that choice is important for teens. Children near the transition age must be given a clearer sense of what JYM is like so that they can make their choice, knowing that JYM has more mature and complex conversations while still providing space for fun. CP and JYM should continue to find ways to have some joint activities that include middle schoolers. This would help to facilitate smoother transitions in general by introducing middle schoolers to the programmatic style of JYM and by creating cross-program relationships among the youth, the adults, and between youth and adults of both programs. There has also been a suggestion that a sort of graduation or transition ceremony be created to ease and acknowledge the transition, and this idea is being considered by Children's Program. Rites of passage might be useful in other areas of our community as well.

Various Possible Solutions We Heard

This section contains notes on the variety of ideas and concerns we heard in our discernment process, retained here for reference.

- Have a firm line...
 - ... so that some children do not feel that they are being denied admission to JYM while others are accepted
 - ... to make it simple
 - ... to not take away middle school leadership
 - Where should the line be placed as to allow CP and JYM to each have ideal numbers of participants? e.g., JYM includes 4, 5 or 6 program-age years? CP includes 11, 12 or 13 program-age years?
- Have a firm line based on age
 - e.g., 12 and under = Children's Program, 13-17 = JYM, 18+= Adult or YAF)
 - Or some other age as the division point
 - What if someone is more/less mature than average?
 - What if they are in a different school level than their age peers (e.g., someone who skipped grades or was held back, such as a 12 year old high schooler, a 14 year old 8th grader, or 13 year old 6th grader).
- Have a firm line based on grade
 - e.g., Entering 7th or 8th = Children's Program; entering 9th through finishing 12th = JYM; left high school previous year = Adult or YAF)
 - What if they are more/less mature than average?
 - What if they are ahead or behind in grade for their age?
 - What about homeschoolers who don't correspond to mainstream age/grade groups, or teens who leave high school without graduating?
- Have a firm line based on age OR grade
 - To deal with the age-grade variability, make a minimum standard for moving up based on either age or grade (but not both), whichever is higher, above a certain

limit. E.g, the 12 year old high schooler would be in JYM, the 14 year old 8th grader would be in JYM, and the 13 year old 6th grader would be in Children's Program.

- Have a lower age/grade guideline...
 - ... to not deprive JYM of participants who are developmentally ready
 - ... to allow youth more time in JYM to develop leadership skills and less loss of leadership as participants age out
 - ... to have enough youth in JYM to have a viable program
- Have a higher age/grade guideline...
 - ... to not deprive CP of participants who make valuable contributions
 - ... to allow youth more time in CP to develop readiness for JYM style
 - ... to have enough youth in CP to have a viable program
- Have a suggested line based on age/grade, with a process for exceptions
 - ... to allow some older youth to continue in CP if it's a better developmental fit (assuming CP is equipped to accommodate or if the child has an assistant or attendant)
 - ... to allow mature middle school aged youth to participate in a program that better meets their needs.
 - "I was forced to stay in Middle School Program and carve pumpkins when I wanted to be sitting in deep conversations like JYMers were having." (paraphrase)
 - "JYM is boring! I want to go swimming every day, not sit in meetings!" (paraphrase)
 - "If I'd been told my children weren't allowed in JYM at that time, we would have stopped attending altogether." (paraphrase)
 - "One year all my friends moved up to JYM and I wasn't allowed to. I was so sad and angry." (paraphrase)
 - What if the exceptions process is a burden on JYM or CP? Or a burden on youth or parents/guardians? How can burdens be reduced?
 - What to do if a youth 'left behind' or not allowed to move up is upset?
 - Who decides, and how? What if some affected parties disagree?
- Other ideas to smoothe the process
 - Have a middle school program that is more JYM-like in terms of youth leadership and decision-making, in a developmentally appropriate manner. (*Note: Children's Program Committee for 2016 is taking this on*)
 - Middle school could be a separate committee from CP and JYM
 - Graduation ceremony from children's program to JYM
 - Children who want to move to JYM before the agreed age or grade must first ask the Children's Program Committee Clerk for a release, and then they can ask JYM to be included. The same applies in reverse for older children wanting to remain in Children's Program only they have to go to the JYM committee for release and then request from Children's Program. I.e. both committee clerks have to agree.
 - Variation: a process for asking to move into a program, but not having to ask to be released.
 - When concerns arise they should be brought to the related committee clerk, and clerks should communicate directly with clerks. (In other words, the staff from either program should not go directly to the other program's staff with concerns.)
 - Registration forms need to include the following questions:
 - Age at time of event?

- Grade this year?
- Choose: Children's Program or JYM? (see criteria)
- JYM: Sleep with JYM or parent/guardian/sponsor? (Sleeping with parent/other is often chosen by younger JYMers in the program for the first time, or those who prefer going to sleep at a time before JYM supervision structure can accommodate).
 - JYM could require anyone under 13 to sleep with parent/guardian/sponsor.
 - Having different requirements for different ages within JYM could be burdensome and disruptive. The *option* to sleep with parent/other has generally worked fine.
- Have a deadline for submitting requests for exceptions, otherwise the Friend will be placed in the program based on age.

--end appendix--