

ABUSE PREVENTION POLICY

INTRODUCTION

Churches need to be proactive. There is a legal reason to create abuse prevention policies, but there is a deeper, more significant reason: to protect the children and others who are vulnerable. Abuse prevention policies are reflective of the value placed on children, youth, families, and others within the church family.

Some may think that our church is too small or that because our pastors know everyone, we need not worry about abuse prevention. We offer a reminder that it's much easier to make plans and develop policies as a means of prevention, rather than wait until they are needed in response to an allegation of abuse.

First Congregational Church desires to be a church that cares through the implementation of this policy, and to prevent abuse (physical, verbal, sexual, or emotional). Adoption of these provisions will enable First Congregational Church to provide a safer and more secure environment for each member of our church family and our guests.

SCOPE

This policy shall apply to all current and future staff and volunteers who have the responsibility of supervising, or those who otherwise participate with, the activities of preschoolers, children, youth, and those whose cognitive functioning is that of a minor.

DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of this policy the following definitions shall apply:

Preschooler, child, children, youth, and minor shall be defined as any individual *under* the age of eighteen (18) or whose cognitive function is that of a minor.

Adult shall be defined as any individual at least eighteen (18) years of age.

Teenage Volunteer or **Teenage Staff** shall be defined as any teen at least fourteen (14) years of age or older, but under the age of eighteen (18), enlisted to assist with the care of minors in a paid or unpaid capacity.

Child Abuse shall be defined as verbal, physical, emotional, or sexual abuse of a preschooler, child, youth, or minor.

Criminal Background Check is the procedure used to check the background of volunteers and staff for criminal activity.

CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECK

Teachers and regular volunteers of activities or programs for children and youth at First Congregational Church will be required to complete a criminal background check. The results of criminal background check or the refusal of any person to participate in a program or activity in lieu of such disclosure requirements will be maintained in strict confidence by the senior pastor.

Whether disclosed voluntarily or as a result of the criminal background check, the following items will automatically disqualify a volunteer or staff person from participating in any activities or programs with minors:

Any conviction for

- Criminal homicide
- Aggravated assault
- Crimes related to the possession, use or sale of drugs or controlled substances
- Sexual abuse
- Sexual assault (rape)
- Aggravated sexual assault
- Injury to a child
- Incest
- Indecency with a child
- Inducing sexual conduct or sexual performance of a child
- Possession or promotion of child pornography
- The sale, distribution, or display of harmful material to a minor
- Employment harmful to children
- Abandonment or endangerment of a child
- Kidnapping or unlawful restraint
- Public lewdness or indecent exposure
- Enticing a child

All charges for any other crimes not listed above, including non-violent convictions such as DUI, will be reviewed by at least two staff (including the senior pastor). However, only the senior pastor may view information obtained as a result of the criminal background check.

STAFF & VOLUNTEER REQUIREMENTS

All employees and volunteers desiring to work with minors are required to complete a criminal background check. Any prospective employee or volunteer who has prior incidents of sexual misconduct will not be considered for hire. Any existing employee or

volunteer who has prior incidents of sexual misconduct or abuse will not be allowed to serve in any capacity involving contact with minors.

Criminal background checks will be performed on each regular volunteer, such as teachers and youth leaders, prior to the beginning of their volunteer service. If the volunteer has already begun service prior to adoption of this policy, a background check will be completed within 30 days. Criminal background checks will be repeated on staff and volunteers every five years or more often as deemed necessary. Only the senior pastor at First Congregational Church will have access to the results of criminal background checks.

Occasional parent volunteers will not be required to complete a criminal background check to participate in their child's classroom; however, an approved staffperson or volunteer must be present at the same time.

Pastoral staff will create a system to ensure that background checks are performed within the established timeframes (initially and every five years).

Upon request, First Congregational Church will allow the applicant to review his/her criminal history transcript at the church, but in no event shall the church allow the applicant to retain and/or copy his/her transcript.

SPECIFIC ACTS AND OMISSIONS IN VIOLATION OF THE POLICY

The following acts or omissions are violations of this Policy and will not be tolerated. Such acts or omissions are to be immediately reported to church staff after the safety of the child, children, or youth involved has been assured.

- Any direct observations or evidence of sexual activity in the presence of or in association with a minor
- Any display or demonstration of sexual activity, abuse, insinuation of abuse, or evidence of abusive conduct towards a minor
- Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between any person and a minor
- Infliction of or physically abusive behavior or bodily injury to a minor
- Physical neglect of a minor, including failure to provide adequate supervision in relation to the activities of First Congregational Church
- Mental or emotional injury to a minor
- The presence or possession of obscene or pornographic materials at any function of First Congregational Church
- The presence, possession, or being under the influence of any illegal or illicit drugs
- The consumption of or being under the influence of alcohol while leading or participating in a function for minors at First Congregational Church

STAFF & VOLUNTEER SUPERVISION

The church will adopt the “two adult” rule, which means no single adult shall be left alone with a child in a room with a closed door. Additionally, closed doors are discouraged. However, a closed door may be permitted in the following situations: (1) A closed door may be permitted if two adults are present. (2) A closed door may be permitted for the nursery because a window in the door permits viewing.

The Director of Christian Education or other church staff will make unannounced visits into classes or other program sites for purposes of supervision.

In counseling sessions with minors, parental permission shall be obtained prior to a pastor meeting privately with a minor, or the two-adult rule shall be used in that instance. Prior permission may be granted by parents to cover a particular time period (e.g., the school year) for their child to receive counseling from a particular pastor.

TEEN VOLUNTEERS

Teens under age eighteen (18) wanting to serve as in any capacity with activities or programs for children must be oriented with regard to this document and the policies explained therein. Teens are exempt from the criminal background check.

OFFSITE ACTIVITIES

Parental permission shall be obtained in advance for offsite church-sponsored activities. Permission forms are to specify the nature of the activity, the location, anticipated arrival and departure times, mode of transport, and the names of adults who will supervise and provide transportation for the activity. All adults who assist with supervision and transportation of an off-site activity must be educated about this policy concerning safety and the prevention of abuse.

First Congregational Church reserves the right to require a criminal background check of adults who provide transportation for church-sponsored activities. Further, we reserve the right to decline participation by an adult who has any charges related to driving under the influence.

CHILD ABUSE REPORTING

First Congregational Church acknowledges that pastors are mandatory reporters as are many of our congregants (in connection with their professional obligations). It is our expectation that reporting will take place consistent with those requirements. In addition, the following procedures will be observed:

1. If any person suspects child abuse, he or she is required to report his/her suspicions immediately to the senior pastor, or in his/her absence, the associate pastor.

2. The church should immediately contact its insurance company and attorney to report the occurrence.
3. Upon the first suspicion of an instance of child abuse, the following steps should be taken immediately:
 - a) Do not treat the suspicion as frivolous.
 - b) Commence the investigation immediately, and conclude it as soon as possible.
 - c) On the same day that the pastor receives the initial report, s/he is responsible for confirming the allegation and the condition of the child.
 - d) Suspend the accused from the performance of duties involving children until the investigation has been completed.
 - e) Inform the victim and the victim's family of the steps that are being taken, and continue to keep them advised of the status of the investigations.

In instances where child abuse is confirmed, the church's options may include:

- Dismissal of an employee if an employee was responsible for the abuse or should have known that the abuse was occurring.
- Member termination, if appropriate to the circumstances.

In instances where the evidence is inconclusive, the church will take action depending on the strength of the available evidence and in consideration of the victim's family's requests.

INSURANCE

The church must maintain a sufficient level of liability coverage to address child abuse and sexual misconduct claims.

APPENDIX

WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE?

Child abuse is the physical, psychological or sexual maltreatment of a child. Most authorities agree that child abuse is defined as “any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation, or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm.” Most child abuse happens in a child's home, with a smaller amount occurring in the organizations, schools or communities within which the child interacts. There are four major categories of child abuse: neglect, physical abuse, psychological/emotional abuse, and sexual abuse.

MORE ABOUT CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Any sexual activity with a child - whether in the home by a caretaker, in a day care situation, a foster/residential setting, or in any other setting, including on the street by a person unknown to the child. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or another child, provided the child is four years older than the victim.

Child sexual abuse may be violent or non-violent. All child sexual abuse is an exploitation of a child's vulnerability and powerlessness in which the abuser is fully responsible for the action.

Child sexual abuse is criminal behavior that involves children in sexual behaviors for which they are not personally, socially, and developmentally ready.

Child sexual abuse includes behaviors that involve touching and non-touching aspects.