



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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“Children are a blessing and a gift from the Lord.” Psalm 127:3

“Whoever welcomes a child welcomes me.” Matthew 18:5

Safe Sanctuary Policy

As a community of Christian faith, the National Ministries of the United Church of Christ (NMUCC) is committed to creating and maintaining programs, facilities, and a community in which employees, volunteers and persons served by the NMUCC can work together in an atmosphere free from all forms of discrimination, harassment, exploitation or intimidation. All persons associated with the NMUCC should be aware that the church is strongly opposed to Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Harassment and that such behavior is prohibited by NMUCC policy. It is the intention of the NMUCC to take action to prevent and correct behavior that is contrary to this policy and, if necessary, to discipline those persons who violate this policy.

God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and ritual abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong. Thus, in covenant with all UCC congregations, First Congregational Church, UCC (FCC) adopts this policy for the prevention of child abuse in our church.

Purpose

Our purpose for establishing this Safe Sanctuary Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our total and unwavering commitment to the physical, emotional and spiritual safety of all our children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

Covenant Statement

First Congregational Church Chelsea hereby pledges to conduct the ministry of Jesus Christ in ways that assure the physical and emotional safety and spiritual growth of all of our children and youth as well as all of our workers with children and youth. We will follow reasonable safety measures when selecting and recruiting workers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all areas of programming and care; we will train our workers with children and youth on our procedures and policies; and we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of the State of Michigan. Application, background checks, and Safe Sanctuary trainings will be the responsibility of the Christian Education committee with oversight by the FCC Church Council president and FCC Pastor(s).

Definitions

Relationships among people are at the foundation of Christian ministry and, as such, are central to the life of the church. Defining healthy and safe relationships through guidelines, policies, and codes of conduct are not meant, in any way, to undermine the strength and importance of personal interaction in our ministries. Rather, it is to assist in more clearly defining behaviors and practices that allow the church to more fully demonstrate its love and compassion for children and youth in sincere and genuine relationships.

Child and youth: A child is defined as anyone under the age of 12 years old. A youth is defined as anyone who is at least 12 years old, but not yet 18 years old. A youth may also be an individual who is 18 years old or older, but still in high school.

Personnel: All paid staff (full or part-time) associated with First Congregational Church

Volunteer(s): Volunteers, including any persons who enter into or offers him or herself for a church-related service, or who assists with or performs a service, whether or not they have been selected or assigned to do so. Volunteers include members serving in Sunday school classrooms, as mentors, on committees, leaders of special programming (youth choir, events, etc)

Types of Abuse

Child Neglect: Omission of the child's basic needs, physical, environmental, emotional and nutritional, that are necessary for a child's well being, or the failure to protect a child or youth from harm.

Emotional Abuse: Verbal or nonverbal violence toward a child that gives the child the message that the child is "not good" and never will be. Verbal abuse is a very common malady that attacks every human being at some point in their lives; some more than others. It can be a very devastating form of abuse when the person experiences the attacks frequently. Emotional abuse is mental or emotional injury to a child or youth that results in an observable and/or material impairment in the child or youth's growth, development or psychological functioning.

Physical Abuse: Physical violence toward a child. Physical abuse is a non-accidental injury, which is intentionally inflicted upon a child or youth. Often it is the transference of adult anger.

Sexual Abuse or Sexual Molestation: Any sexual contact with a child by an adult or an older youth. These acts may range from touching of the penis, vagina, buttocks, or breast/chest area to sexual intercourse. This includes any activity which is meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of the adult, child or youth. Sexual abuse perpetrated by another child or youth is any contact or activity of a sexual nature that occurs between a child or youth and another child or youth when there is no consent, when consent is not possible, or when one child or youth has power over the other child or youth. This includes any activity which is meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of any of the children or youth.

Drug & Alcohol Abuse: There is an increase in the use of alcohol among junior and senior high school students. Children or youth that show up at FCC/sponsored event under the influence of alcohol or drugs, who bring these substances with them on church retreats, camp or other activities or those who are reported by peers to be intoxicated may need help to stop dangerous behavior.

Economic Exploitation: Economic exploitation is the deliberate use of a child or youth for money or power. This includes forcing a child to work, using someone against their will or using another person's labor without offering them adequate compensation.

Bullying: Bullying happens when someone hurts or scares another person on purpose. Usually, bullying happens over and over. Bullying also can happen online or electronically. Cyberbullying is when children or teens bully each other using the Internet, mobile phones or other cyber technology. Unfortunately, not everyone takes bullying seriously, including adults.

Physical Touch Guidelines

APPROPRIATE

- Non-demanding, gentle, touch on shoulders, arms/hands, head/neck, or back
- Sitting child on lap only for 5 yrs and younger
- Maintain personal space
- Side hugs (when initiated by the child)

INAPPROPRIATE

- Any form of corporal punishment or restriction of movement
- Demanding hugs
- Kissing
- Touching any other area than listed above
- Piggyback or neck rides
- Picking up a child over the age of 5 yrs
- Picking up a child under the age of 5 without permission or immediate need
- tousling hair (difficult for children w/ sensory issues)

Personnel/Volunteer Selection Policies

All volunteer and personnel who work with children and youth at FCC will be:

- At least 21 years old
- At least 5 years older than the oldest child/youth they will be supervising
- Attended FCC for a minimum of 6 months
- Complete and sign the Adult Application for those Working with Minors form and the related waivers giving permission to check references and background information.
- Undergo a criminal background check (repeated every five years) at no expense if they will have supervisory program responsibility for children/youth.
- Individuals who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect may not work in any church-sponsored activity or program for children, youth or vulnerable adults.

Supervision Guidelines

Whenever supervising activities involving children and youth at FCC:

- Two adults will be present at all times.
- Children and youth will be accompanied into and out of church sponsored activities by their parent or legal guardian or people authorized by a parent/legal guardian.
- One-on-one interactions with children and youth will be with an open door and visibility to all at all times.
- Parents/legal guardians have the right to visit and observe children's/youth activity, classroom, or church-sponsored program at any time, unannounced.
- Adults will never transport child/youth by self or otherwise leave FCC premises.
- When arriving late or separated from the group children and youth will be accompanied to and from classrooms and church-sponsored activities within the building by a parent or an adult who has a completed background check on file.
- Parent(s) are responsible for their child(ren) and youth outside of designated programming/programming areas, spaces and times.

Youth to Youth Interactions

In our goal to create a safe and healthy environment for all God's people, we want to model an expectation of safety and respect between youth. This includes freedom from physical, emotional or sexual abuse. If personnel or volunteers observe any of the above the following steps will be taken:

- Remove involved youth from the situation immediately
- Notify parent/guardian and nearest available staff member
- Complete an Incident Report to be copied and shared with parent/guardian and kept on file
- Provide resources to involved families at the direction of FCC staff

In situations of recurring incidences (more than 2), parent/guardian will be asked to accompany youth to programming or youth will be removed from programming for a probationary period to be determined by FCC staff.

Reporting and Response

If a suspected incident of child abuse or neglect occurs at or is revealed to a volunteer/personnel at an FCC-sponsored activity, the adult in charge of the activity will:

- Ensure the immediate safety of the child or youth
- Follow-up with a church pastor who will in turn:
 - Report the incident to the parent(s)/legal guardian(s) and church council as deemed necessary, in the order and manner best suited by the specific incident
 - Call and report the incident to the County Office of the Department of Social Services (DSS)
- Church personnel acknowledge their obligation and responsibility to protect children and youth and understand there may be legal requirements to report known or suspected abuse of children or youth to appropriate church leaders and state authorities in accordance with these policies.
- Provide appropriate next step counseling resources to all involved.

Conclusion

In all of our ministries with children, youth, and vulnerable adults, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child, youth and vulnerable adult will be surrounded by steadfast love.

Implemented/adopted May 2019

FCC Incident Report

This form is to be completed by an adult witness whenever an incident requiring attention occurs. Completed form to be given to the parents/guardians of the child involved, and a secured copy kept on file.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Name of group/activity: _____ Adult supervisors: _____

Name of injured/affected person: _____

Age (If under 21): _____

Names of parent(s)/guardian(s): _____

Date of incident: _____ Time of incident: _____

DESCRIPTION OF INCIDENT

1. Describe the incident – presenting issue, without making diagnosis if not qualified to do so (use the back of page if necessary):
 - i. Where in the facility/site did it happen?
 - ii. What was the person doing when the incident happened?
 - iii. How did the incident happen?

2. Names of leaders supervising at the time of the incident:

3. Name(s) of any other witnesses to the incident:

4. How did the person respond after the incident?

5. Was first aid given or some other action taken? Yes / No

If yes, by whom & what was given? _____

6. Follow up actions:

Printed name/signature of person completing form: _____

Printed name/signature of parent/guardian: _____

Printed name/signature of FCC staff member: _____