

**The First Congregational Church
United Church of Christ
177 North Main Street
Concord, New Hampshire 03301-5039**

Sexual Exploitation, Ministerial Conduct, and Youth Protection Policy

Statement of Procedures

I. Children/Youth Protection Procedures

The primary purpose of this statement of procedures is to put into place every reasonable precaution to ensure the safety, well-being, and spiritual health of our children, of their parents, and of the adults/young adults who interact with our children. The secondary purpose of this statement of procedures is to protect adults and young adults from potential allegations of abuse and limit the extent of our church's legal risk.

The policies and procedures set forth will follow our children and youth to any and all places. The church shall exercise best efforts to ensure that the staff of any organization or event that our children and youth attend will be required to meet equivalent or stricter worker selection criteria.

A. Worker Selection

1. All church workers having contact with children or youth will be actively attending members for six months or friends of the church for a minimum of one year.
2. All paid and volunteer workers in contact with the children or youth of our church will complete a disclosure/application form. The forms will be kept in a locked cabinet at the church. Following a submittal of the form, the pastor and a member of the Board of Christian Education will review the forms and will interview candidates to ensure clarity and to address any concerns. Each disclosure/application form shall be reviewed and a criminal records check performed by the State of NH. If the volunteer has lived in New Hampshire for less than three years, a full FBI check will be performed. Results of these checks will only be seen by the Pastor. First Congregational Church will pay for the cost of the criminal records check. It is understood that the volunteer will report any new pertinent information to the Pastor who may recommend that Cabinet perform additional background checks.
3. Any church committee sponsoring an event shall be responsible for assuring that all church workers having contact with children or youth are approved under this procedure. The church office will maintain a list of pre-approved church workers to eliminate repeated approval requests.

B. **Worker Training**

1. The Board of Christian Education shall be responsible for arranging training for all workers/volunteers working with children as follows:
 - a. Review reasons (show *Reducing the Risk* video, part I)
 - b. Explain policies and procedures (show *Reducing the Risk* video, part II) including the importance of reporting suspicious behavior immediately.
 - c. Review forms.
 - d. Allow for question and answer period at the end.
 - e. Only volunteers and workers who have participated in the training sessions will be allowed to take part in church school and youth activities. Training must be completed every two years.

C. **Worker Supervision**

1. Two approved individuals over the age of eighteen shall be present at all times during all activities involving the children or youth of our church. Adults in the same room may supervise different activities or small groups such as two different church school classes. Activities in adjoining rooms may be conducted by a single adult if a second adult is able to observe activities from the other room.
2. All windows in church school and nursery/toddler room doors shall always be uncovered.
3. There will be random monitoring of classrooms during church school and all other activities involving the children and youth of our church.
4. Parents are welcome in the classrooms and at youth activities to observe at any time.
5. In a situation in which an adult has a legitimate reason to be alone with a child, such as transporting a child from church to home, a written parental consent must be obtained.
6. When private consultation is needed between an adult and a child, the adult shall use an area that is removed, but in view, of other people.

II. **Reporting Requirements**

- A. If the allegation is against anyone other than the pastor, the pastor and the president will be informed as soon as possible. The pastor will be the primary lead during the investigation into the allegation and will be responsible for contacting all necessary parties.

- B. If the allegation is against the pastor of this church, then the president and the Pastor/Parish Relations Committee will be notified as soon as possible. The president will notify the association with which the pastor holds standing. All information will be kept confidential and kept in a locked box at the church.
- C. The response team will gather statements or other information from the individuals involved and from others who may have pertinent information.
- D. The response team shall make determinations and take actions appropriate to resolve the matter. If it is found that sexual exploitation or sexual harassment has occurred, the guidelines below shall be followed.

III. Responding to Allegations

- A. In the event an allegation of abuse or misconduct is confirmed, the pastor will play the primary role in responding, unless the allegation is against the pastor, at which time the president will be the primary person in charge of the response.
- B. In the event of an allegation of abuse or misconduct, the response team will report the incident in a manner consistent with its legal obligation under New Hampshire State Law. (see exhibit 1)
- C. An emergency meeting of the response team will be held to inform its members and formulate a response.
 - 1. Such action may include one or more of the following:
 - a. Formal reprimand with defined expectations for changed behavior, including possible public notification;
 - b. Recommending or requiring a program of growth that may include education and/or counseling;
 - c. Probation, with the terms of probation clearly defined;
 - d. Dismissal from employment or volunteer leadership position.
 - 2. If the accused employee or volunteer is an authorized minister (i.e., holds ordained ministerial standing or has been commissioned or licensed by an Association of the United Church of Christ) the response team shall inform the appropriate body of the wider United Church of Christ (i.e., the Conference of the United Church of Christ in which the minister has standing; the Association in which the minister has standing and its committee on ministry) of the allegation. First Congregational Church will cooperate fully in any procedures of the United Church of Christ related to the person's ministerial authorization while retaining the right and responsibility to employ or designate leadership within First Congregational Church as it determines best.

3. If allegations of possible child abuse are included in the complaint(s), the response team shall notify appropriate secular authorities (i.e., the New Hampshire Division of Children, Youth, and Families; police), and the First Congregational Church shall fully cooperate in any investigation. This procedure shall continue to be followed to determine the continuance of the individual(s) in leadership positions in the First Congregational Church.
- D. A written summary of the response team's proceedings in such cases will be maintained and kept in a locked box at the church.
 - E. In determining whether alleged conduct constitutes sexual harassment or exploitation, consideration shall be given to the record of the alleged incident(s) as a whole and to the totality of the circumstances, including the context in which the alleged incident(s) occurred.
 - F. Any person bringing a sexual harassment or exploitation complaint or assisting in investigating such a complaint will not be adversely affected in terms and conditions of employment, church membership or affiliation, or otherwise discriminated against or discharged.
 - G. If the complainant(s) or accused person(s) is not satisfied with the disposition of the matter by the response team, he or she has the right to appeal the vice president of the church who shall refer the matter to the Cabinet for resolution.

IV. Access

- A. All church members, friends of the church, and other persons actively attending shall have access to a copy of this policy and procedures. The Cabinet and Board of Christian Education shall arrange for, and designate, a person to conduct an annual training of this policy and procedures.

It is ultimately the responsibility of the entire congregation, *not just those in leadership positions*, to create and maintain a climate that supports the growth and welfare of children and youth.

Approved by the Cabinet of First Congregational Church, UCC on August 14, 2002