

Church Safety Policy of the First Congregational Church, UCC of Waterville Maine

Then Jesus took a child and made him stand in front of them. He put his arms around him and said to them, “The person who in my name welcomes one of these children welcomes me; and who welcomes me, welcomes not only me but also the one who sent me.”

(Mark 9:36-37)

In an effort to ensure the safety and well-being of children, youth, and adults who attend The First Congregational Church of Waterville, we have established this Church Safety Policy.

We, as members of Christ’s family and First Congregational Church, UCC, are entrusted with the care of many children and youth. This includes caring for their minds, bodies, and souls. We strive to nurture these children and youth and to show them Christ’s love. Such a monumental responsibility implies that we strive to protect the children and youth in our charge.

This policy is designed to protect our children and young adults from verbal, physical, and sexual abuse that could potentially occur on church grounds or at a church sponsored event. It is also designed to protect adults and young adults, who teach and guide our children/youth, from potential allegations of abuse.

Glossary of Terms

Child: any person under 16 years of age

Young Adult: any person ages 16-21

Adult: any person 21 years or older

Definition of Abuse:

1. Physical – strike, spank, slap or shake
2. Verbal – humiliate, degrade, threaten, swear at, or shame
3. Sexual – inappropriate touching or verbal exchange, any purposeful touching on an area of the body covered by a bathing suit; excluding diapering

Screening and Selection of those working with children/young adults

1. Complete an application including work history, education, number of years as a resident of the Waterville and surrounding communities, and disclosure of criminal convictions.
2. Provide a minimum of 3 references which shall include both work related and personal.
3. Grant written permission to conduct a background check. This shall include a National Sex Offender registry search and County Criminal Records search for every county where the applicant has lived or worked, using all prior names and addresses of the applicant.
4. Basic Life Support certification is necessary.
5. Christian Education Committee and the minister will interview the applicant.
6. The Minister in conjunction with the church council shall give final approval.

Supervision of those working with children and young adults

1. Prevention Strategies

A. For their safety and security, children/young adults will be supervised at all times. In formal activities such as Sunday school, youth fellowship, etc., there should be two persons present at all times. This can be two adults or 1 adult and 1 young adult. If it is not possible to have two persons present, the room must have a door with a window or the door left open at all times so the room is easily observed by another adult/young adult.

B. If a child/young adult is not involved in a formal church event such as coffee hour, pot luck, parents or an identified adult will be responsible for supervising their child/young adult.

C. Reasonable efforts will be made to ensure that children under 16 years of age will only be allowed to leave a church function with a parent or a person previously approved by the parent.

D. In a retreat/camp type setting, supervising adults should never be alone in a sleeping facility with a single child/young adult.

E. Adults will respect children's rights not to be touched in ways that make them feel uncomfortable and their right to say no.

F. Written parental permission/or registration shall be obtained before a child/young adult participates in any formal activity.

G. A health history is highly recommended for any child/young adult participating in a formal activity and should include allergies, medications, and any medical condition ie. seizures, diabetes, anxiety, etc.

H. Anyone working with children will be given guidelines for discipline and health emergencies.

I. Counseling and private conversations with a child or youth should never be undertaken when alone in any building. Another adult should be present in the building and should be aware that a private conversation/counseling session is being conducted. If at all possible, these conversations should be held in a location that is visible but not audible to the second adult.

J. State of Maine driving laws will be followed by all people at all times.

K. Parents/guardians are welcome at any time.

2. Volunteers (nonemployed) who work with children

A. Must be at least 16 years of age.

B. Must be a member or actively involved in the church for six months before being eligible to work with children.

C. Must be paired with another church employee or volunteer.

D. Must be approved by the minister and CE Committee.

Reporting Procedure in case of suspected physical or sexual child abuse

1. All persons who reasonably suspect or have proof of child abuse shall report directly to the pastor or moderator of the church within 24 hours.

2. If the pastor is suspected of abuse, it should then be reported to the moderator or Chair of the Deacons.

3. When the pastor or moderator receives a report of reasonable suspicion or provable physical or sexual abuse, that person shall contact the appropriate agency, ie. Local police, church lawyer, Maine Conference.

4. The child's parents should be notified before any formal action is taken.

5. Reporting of abuse is mandatory by state law, Title 22 MRSA 4011-A.

Reporting inappropriate conduct between an adult/young adult and a child/young adult

1. Problem behavior or any disturbing incident should be reported to the minister or moderator (in the minister's absence) as soon as possible.
2. The incident/behavior should be reviewed by the CE Committee and the appropriate action taken.
3. Appropriate actions include issue warnings, close monitoring, termination of employment, or any other action the CE Committee deems appropriate.
4. Reports of such incidents will be documented and kept on file.