

First Congregational Society
First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church of Chelmsford
Religious Education Church School Code of Conduct for Adults
Working/Volunteering with Children and Youth Policy

A. Adults who work with children and youth at First Parish are expected to make the best interests of children and youth their first priority. Adults are expected to nurture the physical, emotional, and spiritual growth of children and youth by fostering an environment of kindness, trust, respectfulness, and fun. No one's enjoyment should ever be at the expense of another person's health or self-esteem. In this manner, we hope to create an environment in which children and youth will be able to explore the spiritual and religious nature of their lives, both as individuals and as members of a community. In light of this, there are some specific expectations that the church has of adults while they are working with children and youth, or at a church-sponsored event. They are as follows:

1. **"Friendship" with Youth** – Although we hope that youth and adults will have genuine fondness for one another, any adult who looks to youth for "friendship" is not sufficiently mature to be in a position of responsibility over them. A "friendship" is reciprocal, where neither person has more responsibility for the health of the relationship than the other. This is antithetical to the adult/youth relationship, where the adult is the one who assumes primary responsibility for maintaining appropriate boundaries and cultivating an atmosphere of health and trust. It is expected that relationships that an adult has with youth who have grown to adulthood will not become exploitive.
2. **Unofficial Contact With Youth Outside of Church Programs** – Sometimes a genuine mentoring relationship will develop between a youth and an adult. These can be not only healthy, but transformative for both. However, it is our concern that a "predator" who does not have the best interest of the youth at heart, will try to disguise an unhealthy relationship with a youth as a mentoring relationship. Therefore, if you wish to be in contact with a youth outside the normal channels of church-sponsored events, it must be with the knowledge and consent of the parents or guardians. This is for the protection of the youth from potential predators, and also for your own protection. You will best protect yourself from false accusations of misconduct by keeping the parents informed of your actions.
3. **Sexualized Behavior** – It is never appropriate to engage in any manner of sexual behavior with a child or youth. This refers not only to explicit sexual behavior, but also to sexually provocative behavior or language. It is not appropriate to tell jokes with sexual content, for example, or to make intentional "double meaning." Physical expressions of affection such as hugs have their place, but it is best to allow the child or youth to initiate them and the adult must be sensitive not to allow them to be prolonged. Inappropriate Sexualized Behavior will not be tolerated; Action enforced per First Parish Congregational Society Safety Policy.
4. **Classroom Conduct** – Any adult found to engage in questionable or objectionable conduct will be removed from contact with that child or youth. Objectionable or questionable conduct may be defined as the non-accidental commission of any act against a child which causes or creates a risk of physical or emotional injury; serious physical injury or commission of a sex offense against a child, including sexual contact. Neglect is also considered objectionable conduct under Massachusetts law.

Neglect as defined under Mass. Laws includes the failure by a caretaker either deliberately, through negligence or inability, to take actions necessary to provide a child with minimally adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical care, supervision, emotional stability and growth, or other essential care.

5. **Drugs and Alcohol** – An adult who is found to be under the influence of illegal drugs or alcohol while working with children or youth, or who provides drugs or alcohol to minors, will be immediately removed from contact with children or youth.

6. **Confidentiality** – adults who work with children and youth under the aegis (the protection, backing, or support) of the church are responsible not only to the children and youth, but to the church as well. Sometimes you will learn that a child or youth is a victim of abuse, is suicidal, has a serious drug problem, etc. **YOU MUST NOT KEEP SUCH INFORMATION TO YOURSELF.** For this reason, please try never to give children or youth the impression that you will keep such secrets for them.
 - a. **CONFIDENTIALITY IS NOT SECRET KEEPING.** For the most part a covenant of confidentiality will mean that you do not repeat information told to you in confidence. However, when the information is potentially damaging to the child or youth, encourage the child or youth to seek help from a parent or other authority figure. In addition you yourself **MUST** talk with Minister and/or Director of Religious Education about an appropriate course of action.

7. **Restroom Guidelines:** Children 12 years of age and younger are to be escorted by two volunteers/workers to the hallway bathroom. Youth 12 years of age and older must go in pairs. This is for their safety to ensure they do not leave the building, or encounter a predator while alone in the hallway. If two volunteers/workers are not available they should always go in a group, never taking a child to the bathroom alone or leaving only one adult in room with children. The workers should check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, and then allow the children inside. The workers should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the worker should open the bathroom door and call the child's name. If a child requires assistance, the workers should prop open the bathroom door, and leave the stall door open as they assist the child. For the protection of all, workers should *never* be alone with a child in a bathroom with the door closed and never be in a closed bathroom stall with a child. Parents are strongly encouraged to have their children visit the bathroom prior to each class.

Accordance with This Code of Conduct

A. Any adult working with children or youth in a church-related program who disagrees with any portion of the code is free to discuss their opinions with the Standing Committee. Any alterations to this document need to be approved by the Standing Committee before a volunteer begins working with children or youth.

B. By signing below, the signatory indicates that they have read this Code of Conduct and agrees to abide by it including submission to CORI* and National Background checks. If an adult violates any of its provisions, they may be removed as a worker at church events. All RE Faith Formation Volunteers are strongly encouraged confidential full disclosure to minister of any legal or personal past events or incidents that may be cause of concern to per First Congregational Society/First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church of Chelmsford Disruptive and Unsafe Behavior Policy.

C. I have read and understand our congregation's policies on keeping children, youth and vulnerable adults safe.

Signature of adult volunteer/worker

Date

Printed name of adult