

Health and Safety Guidelines: First Congregational Society, Church School First Congregational Society Child Policy (RE UU Faith Formation)

General Purpose Statement

At First Parish Congregational Society of Chelmsford MA, we are concerned with your child's health and safety as well as your child's religious education. We seek to provide a safe and secure environment for the children who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the below practices, our goal is to protect the children from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers (workers) from false accusations. These health and safety guidelines are set up to ensure that First Parish Congregational Society of Chelmsford is a safe and healthy place for all children and youth. Please become familiar with the following guidelines for the Church School:

Definitions

For purposes of this policy, the terms "child" or "children" include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years. The term "worker" includes both paid and unpaid persons who work with children. The term "volunteer" means anyone involved in any activities involving minors, in counseling of minors, or in one-on-one mentoring of minors. National background checks are not required to be conducted on Sunday School or Vacation Bible School volunteers.*

Selection of Workers/Volunteers

All persons who desire to work with the children participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes the following:

a) **One Year Rule**

No person will be considered for any volunteer position involving contact with minors until being involved with First Parish Congregation of Chelmsford for a minimum of one year. This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant for working with children.

b) **Written Application**

All persons seeking to work/volunteer with children are required to fill a written application form supplied by the Director of Religious Education to be completed, signed and returned to the Director of Religious Education. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, previous religious organization affiliation, references and employment information. The application form will be maintained in confidence securely filed in the First Parish Congregational Society of Chelmsford Religious Education Office.

c) **Personal Interview**

Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face interview with the Director of Religious of Education may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position.

d) **Reference Checks**

A minimum of two reference checks on all employees and volunteers will be conducted. Reference checks will be institutional in nature (organizations where the applicant worked or volunteered with minors in the past) e.g. other churches, scouts, etc. There reference checks are required for anyone involved in overnight activities involving minors, counseling of minors or one-on-one mentoring of minors. Sunday Morning School volunteer reference checks are applicable as determined by Director of Religious of Education. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence securely filed in the First Parish Congregational Society of Chelmsford Religious Education Office.

e) **National Criminal Background Check**

A national criminal background check is required for all employees (regardless of position) and all “volunteers” who interact with children in church activities with the exception of Sunday Morning School volunteers. Before a background check is run, prospective workers/volunteers will be asked to sign an authorization form allowing First Parish Congregational Society of Chelmsford as per First Parish Congregational Society of Chelmsford National Background Check and CORI policy to run the check. All volunteers including Sunday Morning School volunteers are required a CORI check. Any individual declining to sign the authorization form will be unable to work with children.

As stated in Parish Congregational Society of Chelmsford National Background Check and CORI policy a disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the Minister, Director of Religious Education and Standing Committee Chair on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event. The background check authorization form and results will be maintained in confidence securely on file in the Minister office.

Medical Alerts

We ask parents whose children are on specific medications or have a medical condition alert their child’s teachers to their special needs and notify Director of Religious Education. Medications are to be listed in Religious Education Registration Form maintained in Religious Education Office. It is the responsibility of parents/guardians to inform RE Staff of updates as needed.

Sick Child Policy

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all of the children at First Parish Congregational Society of Chelmsford. Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other children when deciding whether to place a child under our care. In general, children with the following symptoms should NOT be dropped off:

- Fever, diarrhea, or vomiting within the last 24 hours;
- Green or yellow runny nose;
- Eye or skin infections; and/or
- Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease.

Children who are observed by our workers to be ill will be separated from other children and the parent or guardian will be contacted to request that the child be picked up for the day.

Check-in/Check-out Procedure

Drop-off for Nursery, Pre K and Kindergarten will begin 15 minutes prior to the church service or 9:50 am. Parents are to let child's teacher know that their child is ready to attend class and the care and responsibility for the child will be shifted to the teacher.

Children below third grade will be signed in by a parent or guardian on attendance sheet. Youth in third grade or older can sign in themselves and teacher/leader will verify they have before end of session.

Parents are to pick up their children at 11:00. Only children in the 4th grade and above are allowed to leave the classrooms by themselves after church school. Children not picked up by 11:15 p.m. will be escorted to the vestry by the teacher.

Accidental Injuries to Children

In the event that a child or youth is injured while under our care, the following steps should be followed:

1. For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide First Aid (Band-Aids, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child's parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up from our care.
2. For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent and/or guardian will immediately be summoned in addition to the worker's supervisor. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.

Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional

Snacks/Allergies

Snacks at church school are not meant to be a meal. Please let the teachers know of any food allergies or special dietary needs your child has. All food allergies or foods not tolerated by your child should be documented and forwarded to the RE office for filing when child are registered in Religious Education program. Allergies will be posted on Attendance Sheets and elsewhere per First Parish Congregational Society of Chelmsford Policy.

Building Safety

A First Aid kit is available across from the Religious Education office in the Hallway cabinet, chapel and in the kitchen. An escape plan and location of fire extinguishers is posted near the doorways on each floor of the church school. The church school conducts a yearly fire/emergency drill.

Field Trips

Parents need to sign permission slips when children are leaving the church premises. **The cemetery and common do not require permission slips.** The destination and expected time of return should be on the permission slip. The parents will provide the teachers with a list of emergency contacts, and medical insurance/contact information for each child. There will be a minimum of 2 adults going with the children as outlined in the Safe Child Policy. All drivers must be covered by auto insurance. Children under 8 who require a car seat or booster must be secured prior to leaving the premises. All other occupants must also wear seat belts. All drivers should be over 21 years of age if possible.

Difficult Incidents/Behavioral Difficulties

Child Care Providers will immediately report any accident to the person in charge to the Director of Religious Education or to the person in charge of the event and to the parents/guardian. If any child's behavior creates a dangerous or distracting environment, a Care Provider or the adult on duty will escort child to the parent/guardian or other responsible adult.

Child Protection and Safety

If a teacher or youth group leader suspects or is made aware of child abuse or has a concern about a child's safety and well-being, this information is to be reported immediately to the DRE, minister, choir director or other adult in charge. The minister, DRE and choir directors are Mandatory Reporters and will report the information to the correct authorities. There must be no use of alcohol or illegal drugs at events specifically for the children or youth groups. If drug use or alcohol use is suspected, the illegal items will be confiscated and the incident will be reported to the parents, the person in charge of the event, and a report will be given to the Standing Committee, Minister, DRE, or Minister of Music as appropriate. In event that medical attention is necessary – this must be the first priority of the person in charge of the event.

Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

For purposes of this policy, "child abuse" is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child's physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following:

- **Physical abuse** – any physical injury to a child that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
- **Emotional abuse** – emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.

- **Sexual abuse** – any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between a child and another child at least four years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
- **Neglect** – depriving a child of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

Childcare workers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children under our care. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at this First Parish Congregational Society of Chelmsford becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under his/her care, this should be reported immediately to the Director of Religious Education and/or Minister for further action, including reporting to authorities as may be mandated by state law. In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at this First Parish Congregational Society of Chelmsford or during our sponsored programs or activities, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. The parent or guardian of the child will be notified.
2. The worker or church member alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave pending an investigation and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation. He or she should be instructed to have no contact with the victim or with witnesses.
3. All allegations of abuse should be reported to the civil authorities, and the organization will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists. The organization will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.
4. The insurance company will be notified, and the organization will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.
5. The Minister and Standing Committee chair are the organizations designated spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect as stated in First Parish Congregational Society of Chelmsford Policy. The advice of UUA legal counsel will be sought before responding to media inquiries or releasing information about the situation to the congregation. All other representatives of the organization should refrain from speaking to the media.
6. A pastoral care will be arranged for those who desire it as deemed necessary by minister at their discretion. This should be for the purpose of providing pastoral support during the time of crisis and not for the purpose of investigating the incident or influencing the investigation.
7. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with children or youth and/or follow Limited Access Sexual Misconduct Agreement as per Minister and Standing Committee Chair Safety Policy. Any person found not guilty will have discussion of process or reengagement with Minister and Director of Religious Education and Standing Committee Chair.

Supervision Requirements

A. For the purposes of these requirements, a “group” is defined as those minors who have been assigned to a nursery, preschool, or individual class or specific program or activity within the context of that class, as well as youth who are taking part in a planned, organized component of any church-related program (ex. Coming Of Age, Our Whole Lives, UU School of Rock, retreats, choir, etc.).

B. Open Door Policy: Classroom doors should remain open unless there is a window in the door or a side window beside it. Doors should never be locked while persons are inside the room.

C. Two Adult Rule: There should be a minimum of two adults scheduled to supervise groups. Exceptions may be made only by the on-site responsible adult leader or person in charge of the event. (For instance, the Director of Religious Education can decide that a youth/adult pair can teach a class on Sunday morning, rather than two adults.) It should always be made clear to all volunteers who is in charge. It is our goal that a minimum of two unrelated adult workers will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during our programs and activities. Some youth classes may have only one adult staff leader in attendance during the class session; in these instances, doors to the classroom should remain open and there should be no fewer than three students with the adult teacher. We do not allow minors to be alone with one adult on our premises or in any sponsored activity unless in a counseling situation

D. 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.

E. In Accordance to First Parish Congregational Society of Chelmsford Code of Conduct and compliance with Church Insurance (Emery & Webb) referring to RE Faith Formation worker/volunteer if an adult violates any of its provisions, they may be removed as a worker at church events. All RE Faith Formation Sunday School volunteers/workers are strongly encouraged confidential full disclosure to minister of any legal or personal past events or incidents that may be cause of concern to First Parish Congregational Society of Chelmsford as required by FPC Church Policy. (rv. 2018 REC)