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Safe Church Policy for Children at Union Congregational Church

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Union Congregational Church, East Walpole, Massachusetts, (hereafter, “Union”) seeks 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 children at Union from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers (workers) from false accusations.

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 any unpaid individual involved in church activities involving minors, in counseling of minors, or in one-on-one mentoring of minors.

Selection of Workers

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

Six Month Rule: No person will be considered for any volunteer position involving contact with minors until s/he/they has been involved with Union for a minimum of six (6) months. This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant for working with children.

Written Consent to Background Check: All persons seeking to work with children must consent in writing to a CORI check. If an individual declines to sign the authorization form, s/he/they will be unable to work with children. A disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the Christian Education committee in consultation with the Pastor 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 on file at Union.

Training: Those approved to work with children will participate in an Abuse training and prevention program approved and provided by Union.

Practices for Interacting with Children

The Two Adult Rule or Three Person Rule will be practiced.

Two Adult Rule

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 teacher in attendance during the class session; in these instances, doors to the classroom should

remain open and there should be no fewer than four students with the adult teacher. Children in nursery care must never be left unattended.

Three Person Rule

At least three individuals (at least one approved adult and the remaining two no younger than 5 years old) must be present at every function and in any enclosed space during all activities involving children and youth.

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.

Parental Supervision

Parents should be made aware of their child's location and participation in activities by workers. Parents may consent to allowing workers to assist children as appropriate with things like trips to the bathroom, getting drinks of water, etc. Parents must consent to any arrangements for transportation, especially in one-on-one situations.

Teenage Workers

We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for babysitters (paid or volunteer) who are themselves under age 18 to assist in caring for children during programs or activities.

The following guidelines apply to teenage workers:

- Must be at least age 14.

- Must be screened as specified above

- Must be under the supervision of an adult and must never be left alone with children.

Discipline Policy

It is Union policy not to administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There should be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children. Workers should consult with the Pastor if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

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.

In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at this church becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under his/her care, this should be reported immediately to the Pastor 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 church 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. S/he/they 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 (as defined by the Bylaws of Union Congregational Church) 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 organization will designate a spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect. The advice of 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 visit will be arranged for those who desire it. 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.

Legal Advice

It is Union policy to seek legal advice prior to any actions of termination of employment of an accused person. It is also our policy to seek legal advice concerning questions on statutory reporting requirements