

Safe Church

First Congregational Church UCC in Kalamazoo is a Christian community dedicated to providing a safe and nurturing environment for all. With this in mind, the following policies and procedures establish guidelines for appropriate interaction between adult staff and volunteers and youth/children. This policy also includes policies and procedures for ensuring our youth/children's safety when involved in church related activities. Although primarily intended for First Congregational Church sponsored activities and events, this policy should also act as an umbrella for any other youth/children's groups or activities occurring within our building. This policy is intended to provide safeguards primarily for our youth and children but also protects our church staff and volunteers as they interact.

Although intended to provide an all encompassing guideline, a main focus of this policy is the prevention of physical abuse. The undergirding principal of this concept was addressed with the following in mind: Physical contact between workers and children/youth will be engaged in with care so as to avoid any appearance of impropriety. First Congregational Church will make reasonable efforts to screen out potential workers who have inappropriate backgrounds.

This is an evolving document which should be reviewed periodically to ensure its policies are up to date and workable.

Code of Conduct

General

A parent is responsible for providing transportation for his/her child to and from church functions or activities, unless the parent provides written or verbal permission for his/her child for alternate transportation.

Two workers must be present during the transportation of a child/youth in a vehicle. No child should be transported alone by an adult who is not their parent or guardian.

Workers shall be required to treat coworkers and children/youth with dignity and respect at all times.

The conversation of all workers shall be wholesome and edifying. There shall not be any obscenity, inappropriate sexual talk, off-color jokes, coarse language, or sexual innuendo. Such conversation will not be condoned.

Music, songs, skits, games and other group activities shall be free of off-color jokes, coarse language, and sexual innuendo.

No alcoholic beverage, other recreational drug, or substance intended to alter mood or function shall be permitted at any FCC function. Prescription medications shall be for the sole use of the person named in the prescription.

No pornography or obscene literature, videos, or other material of said nature will be permitted at any FCC activity. (Note: educational materials approved by the Board of Christian Education that discuss such topics may be used in educational programs or classes.)

Humor should be used with care. It will be used in ways that are edifying and not at the expense of another's self-esteem.

Physical contact between workers and children/youth will be engaged in with care so as to avoid any appearance on impropriety.

Observed violations of the Code of Conduct by any worker must be reported to a member of the professional staff to be referred to the pastoral staff.

Any worker found in violation of the Code of Conduct may be asked to resign from their involvement in the ministry.

Any worker under investigation for a criminal violation of the Code of Conduct will be suspended until the disposition of the investigation.

Nursery and Toddler Programs

At least two workers must be available for both nursery and toddler care whenever it is scheduled. When there are fewer than five children in either the nursery or the toddler room, the office volunteer may be counted as one worker, providing the classroom doors are left open.

Workers may not take children from the nursery. Any significant medical problem must be reported immediately to the child's parent(s).

If practicable, only workers of the same sex will accompany or assist a child using a restroom. A child using a restroom shall occupy the restroom alone unless assistance is required (e.g. handicapped, toddlers, etc.) For children who require assistance, the adult worker must assist the child with the bathroom door ajar. The diapering of an infant or toddler must take place in the nursery room under the general observation of another worker. For children who do not require assistance in the bathroom, an adult worker must remain outside the bathroom.

Enrichment Time, Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, or similar programs.

At least two workers must be available for the Beginner's classroom. One worker is permissible in the other classrooms. However, one worker to one student is never acceptable. In this situation, classrooms must be combined so there is more than one student present.

Unless there is a planned activity outside the classroom, children must not leave the classroom unless they become ill, need to use the bathroom or for any other compelling reason.

If practicable, only workers of the same sex will accompany or assist a child using a restroom. A child using a restroom shall occupy the restroom alone unless assistance is required (e.g. handicapped, toddlers, etc.) For children who require assistance, the adult worker must assist the child with the bathroom door ajar.

Youth Group

Any youth activities, whether FCC or not, must adhere to these policies.

At least one parent shall sign a Church Permission Slip which includes a transportation permit before a child/youth may participate in any function or activity and before permitting the participation of any child/youth in any overnight function or activity off church grounds. A copy of Church Permission Slip is attached to the policy.

A youth group leader must be 21 years or older, or be deemed a responsible adult and be approved by both the Christian Education and the Personnel Committees. Regardless of the relative ages, it is never acceptable for a youth group leader and a youth group member to date each other.

At least two youth group leaders must be present, providing appropriate and sufficient supervision, at all youth functions.

While the appropriate display of affection is often part of conveying support and encouragement to one another, such displays can be misinterpreted. Appropriate displays of affection between youth leader and youth must be limited to such actions as a brief hug, an arm around the shoulders, an open-handed pat on the back, a handclasp or handshake, or a light touch to the forearm. Restrict displays to a public area. A youth group leader or member's right to refuse such a display of affection will be respected.

No gifts or communication of an intimate personal nature will be directed to a youth by a youth group leader.

Leaders who deal with youth may, where appropriate, engage in one to one counseling with the youth. Obviously, by its very nature, one to one counseling is a sensitive matter, often conducted in private. Before engaging in one to one counseling, leaders must be cognizant of the potential for problems and take all steps possible to avoid the appearance of impropriety. Leaders will, if possible and appropriate, advise the youth's parent(s) must not be advised that one to one counseling may occur, and the leader must advise his immediate supervisor that such counseling may occur.

One to one sessions with a youth must be observable by the parent of the youth or by a second adult who is not related to the leader.

On overnight trips, a leader shall not sleep in a room, tent, camper, or other facility with any single youth not his/her own. Note: An exception may be made with written permission by a parent regarding who is permitted to be in with their child.

At least two leaders must be present at or before the time that any function or activity is scheduled to begin. At least two leaders shall remain present at the conclusion of the activity until all youth are picked up by their parent or otherwise leave the activity.

Discipline Policy

First and foremost, "discipline" is that which teaches. It is rooted in the same etymology as "disciple". Thus, what we ought to be about in discipline is the building of disciples! Correction is about teaching young persons what discipleship looks like. Our methods, then, must be consistent with the life of a disciple; else we send mixed messages!

Children and youth engage in behaviors that occur in church-sponsored programs as well as in the family home. When these behaviors occur in church-sponsored programs, however, it is often a church worker who must intervene, especially when the child/youth is under his or her supervision. An adult can interrupt or stop an unacceptable behavior by teaching the child/youth which behaviors are acceptable and which behaviors are not. By example and over time, the adult teaches the child/youth how to behave in a socially acceptable way and in a manner that is Christ-like . . . the manner of a disciple!

In the life of the church, physical restraint methods of correction shall not be used in extreme cases where risk of physical injury is imminent. Separation from the class, or "Time Out" shall be used if verbal discipline is ineffective. In the event behavior that disrupts the learning of the rest of the class continues, leadership staff and parent(s) shall be brought in for consultation. Dismissal from class shall be the absolute last resort.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Any individual who has received an allegation or suspect that a violation of the Code of Conduct has occurred during a FCC sponsored activity must contact a member of the FCC professional staff immediately and then file a written report. The written report must be submitted to the Senior Pastor within twenty-four hours of them becoming aware of the allegation or violation. All individuals must maintain confidentiality, talking only with professional staff and investigators.

The professional staff person who has received the aforementioned allegation must complete Form for Suspected Incidents of Child Abuse. This document will be kept confidential. In addition, this document will be kept separate from any worker records of the accused and disclosed only pursuant to mandatory reporting requirements.

If the alleged violation is a criminal nature, the Senior Pastor must notify the authorities immediately and then follow the prescribed legal procedure. FCC will not take any further action regarding the accusation until such time as the investigation has been conducted.

If the alleged violation is of a non-criminal nature, the Senior Pastor must contact the Chairperson of the Board of Christian Education and the Executive Committee to determine what further actions are required. This group will act as the abuse response committee for the church.

No one, except the Senior Pastor and legal counsel for the First Congregational Church, has authority to speak on behalf of the First Congregational Church concerning any accusation of abuse. In the event that the Senior Pastor is accused, the church moderator shall assume the Senior Pastor's role as far as this policy is concerned.

Transportation of Children and Youth

Established public carriers - trains, buses, and commercial airlines - are the safest and most comfortable way for groups to travel. Chartered busses usually are the most economical transportation for groups of 20 or more. It may be necessary for small groups to travel in private cars; however the use of chartered equipment from established rail, bus and airline companies should always be considered. These companies have excellent safety records because of their periodic inspections and approved health and safety procedures.

TRAVEL BY AUTOMOBILE

All drivers must be at least 21 years of age. The only exception is a youth leader who is a paid employee of FCC.

All paid employees of FCC must have a Chauffeur License before they transport children or youth. This is a Michigan law.

All drivers must have a valid driver's license and all vehicles must be registered and insured. Copies must be provided to the FCC before or at the time of the trip.

All passengers must be restrained by seat belts and/or booster seats as the law requires.

Driving time should be limited to a maximum of 10 hours and must be interrupted by frequent (every 2 hours) rest, food and recreation stops. Whenever possible (especially on long trips) driving should be limited to daylight hours. Long trips should include at least one extra qualified driver to replace a driver who is injured or becomes ill.

All passengers, including the child of the driver, must have a signed permission slip in the vehicle in which they are riding.

No child should be transported alone by an adult who is not their parent or guardian.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE TRIP PLANNER(S)

Discuss the trip in detail with all participants and drivers and agree on the ground rules.

Establish realistic schedules for the trip and safe places to stop for breaks along the way. Plan rest stops every two hours. Prearrange meeting places for vehicles on the trip. There should be no driving in caravans or convoy formation. Provide written directions and maps for all destinations.

Give important passenger information to each driver. Verify that each passenger has a seat belt.

Place a first-aid kit in each vehicle.

Arrange for a cell phone to be in each vehicle and provide all numbers to all drivers.

Responsibilities of the Driver

Make sure that the vehicle is in safe operating condition before the trip.

Ensure that everyone is wearing a seat belt any time the vehicle is moving.

Drive within posted speed limits.

Keep at least a three-second interval between the vehicle and the vehicle in front of you when on the highway.

Drive courteously and defensively - Remember you are a model for the young drivers and future drivers who are riding with you.

Never drive when sleepy.

Do not consume alcohol - Do not smoke in the car.

Never use a cell phone while driving. Pull over and stop, put the car in park, and put on flashing lights before dialing (or let one of the kids make the call for you).

Require that your passengers keep their activity and volume at a level that allows you to drive safely. If they are not able to do that - STOP!!!!

Responsibilities of the Passengers

Follow the rules for the trip.

Keep your seat belt fastened securely.

Practice good behavior - especially to not yell, argue or throw things.

Be helpful - watch for road signs - read maps etc.

Play games or music quietly with other passengers

Stay with the group when stopped.

Alert the driver to any problems that you might see (a low tire, a missing buddy, luggage that was not returned to the car, going the wrong direction etc.).

Follow the instructions given by the driver before and during the trip.

HAVE A GOOD TIME!

ANNUAL AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

In consideration for my child being permitted to participate in Youth Group activities at First Congregational Church UCC of Kalamazoo during the time period _____ to _____, I (we), _____, the parent(s) and/or legal guardians of _____, agree to the following provisions.

Acknowledgment

I understand that there are numerous risks and benefits associated with participation in any youth athletic or social activity including, but not limited, intentional as well as unintentional acts from circumstances under which, or individuals over whom, the Church has only limited control or no control whatever.

In consideration for the privilege of allowing my child to participate in the above-named activity, I agree to release and hold harmless the Church, its officers and agents, from any liability to or responsibility for bodily injury, damage or illness to the above-identified child while participating in any youth athletic or social activity which may be directly or indirectly sponsored by the Church. Further, I agree to indemnify and hold harmless the Church, its officers and agents with respect to any claim asserted by or on behalf of my child as a result of bodily injury, illness or damage.

PLEASE READ CAREFULLY – THIS PERMISSION SLIP IS A LEGAL DOCUMENT WHICH INCLUDES A RELEASE FROM LIABILITY AND INDEMNIFICATION

MEDICAL EMERGENCY CARE AUTHORIZATION

I, _____, parent/guardian of _____
(Parent's/Guardian's Name) (Child's Name)

authorize a chaperone from First Congregational Church, **while attending First Congregational Church Youth Group events**, to consent to an X-ray, examination, anaesthetic, medical or surgical diagnosis or treatment, and hospital care to be rendered to the minor named above under the general or special supervision and on the advice of any licensed physician or surgeon, when the need for such treatment is immediate, and when efforts to contact me are unsuccessful.

_____ Date _____ Signature of Parent or Guardian

Phone numbers where we can usually be reached: Home: _____
Work: _____
Cell: _____

Alternate person(s) who may be called if we cannot be reached:

Name Phone Relationship

Special instructions or medical conditions: _____

MEDICAL INSURANCE (Company Name, Policy #) _____

Expectations of Participant

Each Participant is:

- A. expected to obey the leader or chaperone.
- B. expected to obey all posted rules and regulations.
- C. to assist by informing/alerting the leader(s) to situations which may cause injury to themselves and/or other participants.

Consent and Signatory Acknowledgments

Participants (including Minors) acknowledgment of personal responsibility.

I have read and my parents have explained the terms of the Agreement, and I agree to abide by the terms of the Agreement and recognize my personal responsibility for my conduct.

Signature _____ Date _____

(Required)

Parent or Guardians (of Minors):

I have read and fully understand the terms of this Agreement, and explained its terms to my child. I give my permission for my child to participate in the youth activities, including but not limited to those described.

In my absence or inability to communicate with emergency and hospital personnel, I hereby grant the Church authority to release, for the purpose of providing medical treatment, my child to the care of medical personnel or physicians as the Church determines as reasonably appropriate.

Signature _____ Date _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Note: All parents or guardians must sign this form.

Received by Church on (date) _____

Permission Form

(Return this page to leader - to be carried in the vehicle with the child.
Must have one for each child if more than one vehicle is being used)

Child's name _____

has my permission to participate in _____

Restrictions: _____

During the activity, I (we) can be reached at:

Address: _____

Phones _____

If I (we) cannot be reached in the event of an emergency, the following person is authorized to act in my behalf.

Name _____

Address _____ Phone _____

Relationship to participant _____

Physician's name _____ Phone _____

Additional remarks _____

If I am unable to transport my child, he/she may be released to:

Name of authorized driver _____ for transport to

(place to be taken after activity) _____

Parent signature _____ Date _____

Off Site activity information

(to be retained by the parent)

Group _____

is planning _____

Date _____ Time _____

Location _____ Phone # _____

Arrangements for transportation:

Time and place of departure _____

Time and place of return _____

Mode of transportation _____

Leaders accompanying the group:

Names: _____

Each participant will need:

Equipment and clothing _____

Expenses _____

Please do not allow your child to bring _____

In case of emergency, the leader will notify:

Name _____ phone# _____

who will immediately notify the parents or guardian.

Leader's signature _____ phone# _____

REPORT FORM FOR SUSPECTED INCIDENTS OF CHILD ABUSE

Date of report: _____

Time of report: _____

Staff person completing report: _____

Name of person making initial report: _____

Victim's name: _____ Age: _____

Parent/Guardian: _____

Location of incident: _____

Brief description of incident: _____

Name of person suspected of abuse: _____

IF SUSPECT IS A MEMBER OF VICTIM'S FAMILY:

Date/time of call to Child Protective Services Agency: _____

Person contacted: _____

Notes of conversation: _____

Form 3200 completed? Yes _____ No _____

Sent? Yes _____ No _____ Date _____

IF SUSPECT IS NOT A MEMBER OF VICTIM'S FAMILY:

Date/time/location of call to law enforcement agency: _____

Agency/Person contacted: _____

Notes of conversation: _____

Senior Pastor notified (date): _____

**Application/Screening Form for Children or Youth Workers
First Congregational Church UCC
Kalamazoo, Michigan**

This application is to be completed by all applicants for any position (volunteer or compensated) involving the supervision or custody of minors. This is not an employment application form. Persons seeking a position in the church as a paid employee will be required to complete an employment application in addition to this screening form. It is being used to help the church provide a safe and secure environment for those children and youth who participate in our programs and use our facilities.

Name (First, Middle & Last) _____

Other Names Used (alias, maiden, nickname, etc.) _____

Present Address _____ City/State/Zip _____

Former Address (if at present address less than seven years) _____

City/State/Zip _____

Home Phone _____

Date of birth _____ Social Security Number _____

Current Driver's License (State, number and expiration) _____

What type of youth or children's work would you prefer? _____

What date will you be available to begin? _____

What is the length of commitment you can make? _____

1. Have you ever been convicted of, or pled guilty or "no contest" to any felony or misdemeanor other than minor traffic violations? yes _____ no _____ If yes, explain fully on a separate sheet (identify each conviction or plea, when and where the conviction or plea occurred, and the sentence received).

2. Have you ever been found liable, or participated in an out-of-court settlement as a defendant in any civil lawsuit? yes _____ no _____ If yes, explain fully on a separate sheet (identify each case, when and where each incident occurred, and the verdict rendered or result of the settlement).

Church History and Prior Youth or Children's Work

1. Please list the name of the church of which you are presently a member and indicate the dates of membership:

2. List, including names, addresses and phone numbers, of all other churches you have attended regularly for the past five years.

3. List all previous church work involving youth or children (indicate name and address of each church, positions held, type of work performed, and dates of service)

4. List all previous non-church work involving youth or children (indicate name, address and phone number of each organization, positions held, type of work performed, and dates of service)

5. List gifts, callings, training, education, or other factors that have prepared you for work with children or youth.

Personal References (Other than relatives or present or former employers)

1. Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

2. Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Applicant's Statement

The information contained in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge. I authorize any references or churches listed in this application to give you any information that they may have regarding my character and fitness for work with children or youth. In consideration of the receipt and evaluation of this application by the church to which I herein apply, I hereby release any individual, church, youth organization, charity, employer, reference or any other person or organization, including record custodians, both collectively and individually, from any and all liability for damages of whatever kind or nature which may at any time result to me, my heirs, or family, on account of compliance or any attempts to comply, with this authorization.

I authorize First Congregational Church through its independent contractor, Intellicorp, to procure background information about me. This report may include my driving history, including any traffic citations; a social security number verification; present and former addresses; criminal and civil history; and the state sex offender records.

I understand that I am entitled to a complete copy of any background information report of which I am the subject, if a request is made within a reasonable time from the date it was produced.

I (initial one) _____waive_____do not waive any right that I may have to inspect any information provided about me by any person or organization identified by me in this application.

Should my application be accepted, I agree to be bound by the Bylaws and polices of the church to which I herein apply, and to refrain from unbecoming conduct in the performances of my services on behalf of the church.

I further state that I have carefully read the foregoing release and know the contents thereof and I sign this release as my own free act. This is a legally binding agreement which I have read and understand.

Applicant's Signature _____ Date _____

Witness _____ Date _____