

**FIRST PARISH UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH
OF MEDFIELD MASSACHUSETTS**

**CHILD AND YOUTH
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
PROTECTION POLICY AND PROCEDURE MANUAL**

As it is the intention of our religious community to promote self-esteem and personal responsibility among our children and our congregation, First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church of Medfield, MA (“FPUU”) is dedicated to the creation of a safe environment for all members and friends and their children. We recognize that religious communities can be vulnerable to incidents of abuse because of the high level of trust, the welcoming spirit and the strong reliance on and need for volunteers, especially in children and youth programs.

Because of the importance in a religious community of volunteerism and of trust, FPUU’s Religious Education Committee is dedicated to adopting every reasonable precaution to prevent abuse and provide safety for both children and adults at all FPUU religious education programs and events attended by children. With that in mind, this Child and Youth Religious Education Protection Policy and Procedure Manual shall be considered as a “work in progress”, which will need to be updated and modified to meet the ongoing, changing needs of FPUU and its congregation.

1. Screening and Selection of People Working with Children and Youth.

- a. **People who provide direct care or supervision to children or youth at FPUU religious education events or programs must meet the following criteria and are referred to as “Qualified Persons” in this Policy and Procedure Manual:**
 - i) **Advisors for youth and volunteer religious education teachers should be active participants at FPUU for at least 6 months before volunteering with children at FPUU or should provide two (2) references and/or act only in the capacity as an assistant teacher.**
 - ii) **Advisors for a FPUU Youth Group (ages 14 through 18) must be at least 25 years old, and all other volunteer religious education teachers, nursery and childcare supervisors must be at least 18 years old.**
 - iii) **Every Qualified Person must complete an application form, and acknowledge reading this Policy and Procedure Manual, the FPUU Code of Conduct and the Religious Education Teacher/Assistant Contract.**
 - iv) **All Qualified Persons must submit to a CORI (“criminal offender record information”) check. All records resulting from the CORI check will be kept in a locked, separate file cabinet and shall be kept for three (3) years. Access to CORI information shall be limited to the person to whom it pertains and the**

two (2) authorized personnel from FPUU who have signed an Agreement of Non-Disclosure currently on file with the MA Criminal History Systems Board (the “Authorized Personnel”). The two Authorized Personnel for FPUU will be the Director of Religious Education for FPUU (“DRE”) and the chairperson of the Religious Education Committee.

- v) **The DRE shall be responsible for determining if an individual meets the criteria of a Qualified Person set forth in this Policy and Procedure Manual and with the agreement of the Authorized Personnel shall determine if an individual is suitable to act as a Qualified Person based upon the results of the CORI check.**

- b. **At the discretion of the DRE, people under 18 years old may be used for childcare and assistant teaching as long as they have a specified Qualified Person over the age of 18 on the Church Premises to supervise.**

- c. **Occasional volunteers, parents, church members or youth who serve the religious education program must read the FPUU Code of Conduct before assuming their duties. The DRE and other Qualified Persons will supervise these volunteers.**

2. Supervision Guidelines and Policies.

- a. **There will be a minimum of two Qualified Persons scheduled to supervise each group of children. The DRE may make exceptions to this two-person rule on a case by case basis.**

- b. **If any Qualified Person, including but not limited to, the DRE or Minister, is alone with a group of children on the church premises, the door to the room will remain open and the DRE, or his/her designated representative will check in with the group from time to time.**

- c. **At FPUU religious education sponsored events taking place away from the church premises, no Qualified Person may be alone with any child or youth (other than in an emergency).**

3. Procedure for Reporting and Responding to Child Abuse – FPUU

Child abuse, as stated in Chapter 119, Section 51A of Massachusetts General Law, is when “a child under 18 years of age is suffering physical or emotional injury resulting from abuse inflicted upon him which causes harm or substantial risk of harm to the child’s health or welfare including sexual abuse, or from neglect, including

malnutrition, or who is determined to be physically dependent upon an addictive drug at birth...”. In this following section, reference to “child” shall mean a child under the age of 18.

a. Qualified Person responsibilities

- i) If a Qualified Person becomes informed during any FPUU activity or program of an incident of child abuse, *whether the abuse occurred during a FPUU church or religious education activity or not*, then that person shall be responsible to:
 - (1) Report the incident to the DRE, Minister, or Chair of the Executive Board as soon as possible. Of these individuals, whoever receives the information will be responsible for informing the others.**
 - (2) Keep the entire matter confidential from anyone other than the Minister, DRE, and Chair of the Executive Board until informed that an investigation has been completed.**
 - (3) Listen carefully and respectfully if the informer is a child. Any investigative questions should be left up to the appropriate authorities.****

- ii) In the event that a Qualified Person observes or suspects an abuse *during* an FPUU religious education program or activity, steps are to be *immediately* taken to protect the child, including removing either the child or the alleged abuser from the situation. In addition, the Qualified Person shall follow the procedures described in paragraph 3.a.i) above.**

b. DRE and Minister responsibilities

- i) The Minister and the DRE are required by Massachusetts law to report child abuse or neglect to the Massachusetts Department of Social Services (“DSS”) when they have “reasonable cause to believe” a child is being abused or neglected. The report is to be filed immediately.**

- ii) The Minister, DRE, and Chair of the Executive Board shall carefully document the handling of any incident, and report the incident immediately, *as appropriate*, to the child’s parents, the church’s attorney, the proper civil authorities, and the church’s insurance company.**

- iii) If the accused is a paid staff person or a volunteer, that person shall be suspended from all activities involving the supervision and teaching of children. This is true for an incident that allegedly occurred either within or outside of church. Suspension will continue pending the outcome of the investigation by the appropriate authority.**

- iv) The Minister, DRE, and Chair of Executive Board will offer support to the**

victim and victim's family. Counseling and/or referrals will be offered to both victim and perpetrator and their respective families.

c. Executive Board Involvement

- i) Terms of reinstatement of any paid staff or volunteer who are accused shall be determined by the Executive Board in conjunction with the Religious Education Committee.**
- ii) The Executive Board shall determine guidelines for communications with the public.**

4. Transportation to, from and during Religious Education FPUU Events.

- a. It is the responsibility of the parent or guardian to provide or make arrangements for the safe transportation to and from FPUU religious education events for their child or children. Volunteers and compensated employees are not allowed to be alone in a car with one child or youth.**
- b. Permission slips must be completed and signed by the parent or guardian before a child or youth can participate in an off-site field trip.**
- c. All drivers must be at least 21 years of age, must provide proof of insurance and must read the FPUU Code of Conduct before driving children. There must be enough seatbelts for everyone and everyone must wear a seatbelt. As mandated by law, all children under 3 years old must be provided with a car seat and children up to 40 pounds or 4 feet tall must be provided with a booster seat.**

This Policy and Procedure Manual was adopted by the FPUU Religious Education Committee and Prudential Committee on September ____, 2004.