

SECTION 3. RELIGIOUS EDUCATION POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

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.

FPUU’s DRE and 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 RE Policies and Procedures document shall be considered a “work in progress” that will need to be updated and modified to meet the ongoing, changing needs of FPUU and its congregation. This document is not a substitute for a Safe Congregations policy, which is the responsibility of the minister and the entire congregation and will be developed separately.

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

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 document:

a. Advisors for youth and volunteer religious education leaders, teachers and childcare workers should be active participants at FPUU for at least 6 months before volunteering with children at FPUU.

b. Advisors for an FPUU Youth Group (ages 14 through 18) must be at least 25 years old. All other volunteer religious education leaders, teachers, and childcare workers must be at least 14 years old and there must be one adult Qualified Person on the church premises to serve as a resource.

c. In compliance with UUA recommendations, all Qualified Persons (including teenaged childcare workers) must fill out an Application for Volunteer Employment every three years and to inform the DRE or Minister of pertinent changes or updates in a timely manner between applications. The application includes a “voluntary disclosure” statement about criminal backgrounds, consent to a background check, and the names of references. See the form at http://www.uua.org/documents/mpl/transitions/responsible_staffing_forms.pdf

d. All Qualified Persons must consent to a CORI (“criminal offender record information”) check and a SORI (“sex offender record information”) check every year. All records resulting from the CORI check will be kept in a locked safe and

shall be kept for three (3) years. Access to CORI and SORI information shall be limited to the person to whom it pertains and the three authorized personnel from FPUU who agree not to disclose the results of these checks unless deemed absolutely necessary. The authorized personnel are the Minister, the Director of Religious Education for FPUU (“DRE”), and a designated person of the Executive Board. This last will be responsible for the input of information into the record check; the viewing of the results will be the responsibility of the Minister and the DRE.

e. The DRE shall be responsible for determining if an individual meets the criteria of a Qualified Person set forth in this Policies and Procedure document and with the agreement of the Minister shall determine if an individual is suitable to act as a Qualified Person based upon the results of the volunteer application, background and reference checks.

f. Every Qualified Person must acknowledge reading this Policy and Procedure document and the FPUU Code of Conduct for Persons Working with Children and Youth.

g. 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 and Training of People Working with Children and Youth.

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).

d. Qualified Persons will participate in training that includes information about working safely with children and youth and preventing and responding to abuse.

3. Procedure for Reporting of and Responding to Child Abuse

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

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:

- 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.
- 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.
- Listen carefully and respectfully if the informant is a child. Any investigative questions should be left up to the appropriate authorities.

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 above.

b. DRE and Minister responsibilities

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

- 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 responsibilities

- Terms of reinstatement of any paid staff or volunteer who is accused shall be determined by the Executive Board in conjunction with the Religious Education Committee.

- 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. **They may be alone to transport more than one youth at a time.**

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 of July 10, 2008, the Massachusetts Child Passenger Safety Law requires that all children riding in passenger motor vehicles must be in a federally approved child passenger restraint that is properly fastened and secured until they are 8 years old or over 57" tall.

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Code of Conduct for Persons Working with Children and Youth

All compensated personnel and volunteers are expected to adhere to the following standards:

Religious education workers, teachers, helpers, and mentors shall not engage in behavior with children or youth that constitutes verbal, emotional, or physical abuse. This includes behavior that is personally threatening or demeaning.

Religious education workers, teachers, helpers, and mentors shall neither indulge in sexually harassing behavior nor engage in sexual, seductive, or erotic behavior with children or youth.

Religious education workers, teachers, helpers, and mentors shall not **use or** allow the use of tobacco, drugs, or alcohol or any illegal activities among children or youth.

Any relationship developed between an FPUU adult and an FPUU child/youth outside of First Parish programs must be with the knowledge and consent of the child/youth's parents and the DRE must be informed.

Religious education workers, including teens, agree to complete the Application for Volunteer Employment every three years, to inform the DRE or Minister of pertinent changes or updates to the application between application periods, and to authorize a CORI/SORI check every year.

In cases of violation of this code, the person or people responsible will be immediately removed from their role, and appropriate action will be taken, including legal action if warranted.