



SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY

Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church

Mandatory Standards for First Church Congregational Boxford (FCCB)

(Unless noted as a guideline)

Revised February 4, 2015

PREAMBLE

God has called us to make our ministries safe, protecting our children, youth, and vulnerable adults from abuse and exploitation. God has also called us to create communities of faith where children, youth, and vulnerable adults can be safe and grow strong. Jesus taught that *"Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me," (Mark 9:37 NRSV)* and *"If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones...it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea."* (Matthew 18:6 NRSV).

Our children, youth, and vulnerable adults must be protected from economic, physical, and sexual exploitation and abuse. Building on this biblical premise, we recognize our faith calls us to offer hospitality and protection to all children, youth, and vulnerable adults, as well as those who are committed to ministering to them as volunteers and employees.

In light of this, FCCB has seen fit to outline policies and procedures that can:

1. Reduce the risk of such abuse happening in our church
2. Make this a place where children, youth, and vulnerable adults can feel safe disclosing abuse
3. Protect the loyal volunteers and employees that minister to our children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

This policy sets forth the MANDATORY requirements in the areas of:

1. Screening
2. Supervision
3. Reporting
4. Response Plan

DEFINITIONS:

“Abuse” means harm or a threat of physical or emotional harm to a child, youth, or vulnerable adult by another person. Abuse includes: (a) the infliction of physical or emotional injury by other than accidental means; (b) the creation of a risk, or allowing the creation of risk, to a child, youth, or vulnerable adult by other than accidental means; (c) committing or allowing the commission of an act of sexual abuse, of sexual exploitation or of prostitution upon the child, youth, or vulnerable adult.

“Adult” means any person 18 years or older.

“Child” or “children” means any person from birth through sixth grade.

“Exploitation” means obtaining or using another person's resources, including but not limited to funds, assets, or property, by deception, intimidation, or similar means, with the intent to deprive the person of those resources.

“Junior Volunteer” means any youth volunteering as a supervisor for a child or children.

“Ministerial Staff” means adult staff members employed by FCCB and trained in the ministry, holding leadership positions in ministries and events at FCCB.

“Official Church Activity” refers to those scheduled activities which are endorsed by or planned by the ministerial staff or the elders.

“Sexual abuse” includes, but is not necessarily limited to, any contact or interaction where a person uses or allows, permits, or encourages the use of the child, youth, or vulnerable adult for the purposes of the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or another person.

“Sexual exploitation” includes, but is not limited to, a situation in which a person allows, permits, or encourages the child, youth, or vulnerable adult to engage in an act which constitutes prostitution under Massachusetts law; or a person having custodial control or supervision of a child or responsible for his/her welfare, allows, permits, or encourages the child, youth, or vulnerable adult to engage in an act of obscene or pornographic photographing, filming, or depicting of a child as provided for under Massachusetts law.

“Supervision” means providing or delegating authority to oversee or direct a ministry or activity.

“Volunteer” means a non-paid adult involved in leadership of a particular ministry or event at FCCB.

“Vulnerable Adult” means a person eighteen (18) years of age or older who, because of a mental or physical dysfunction, is unable to manage his/her own resources, carry out the activity of daily living, or protect himself/herself from neglect, exploitation, or a hazardous or abusive situation without assistance from others.

“Youth” means any person who has begun the seventh grade, but has not reached his/her eighteenth birthday.

SCREENING PROCEDURES:

Careful screening is one way to reduce the possibility of the abuse and exploitation of children, youth, and vulnerable adults. It can be time consuming and expensive, but well worth the effort in peace of mind that reliable and safe staff and volunteers are in place for every program that involves children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

1. All staff and volunteers who have regular and direct contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults shall be required to fill out a Background Screening Form that shall include but is not limited to:
 - a. Standard contact information
 - b. Experience/qualifications for the position
 - c. Voluntary disclosure of past criminal history, including any criminal charges and/or convictions
 - d. Waiver of confidentiality allowing the church to secure the background checks and references necessary.
 - e. Listing of two non-relative references. This list shall have complete contact information for all references. This portion of the application process is considered incomplete if full contact information for the references is not provided.
2. Background screening:
 - a. Minimum --- Massachusetts state background check.
 - b. Recommended – National background check.
 - c. A national background check is highly recommended if the person has lived outside the state and/or has lived near the border of another state within the last ten years.
3. Persons who have a break in volunteer or paid service of one or more years shall resubmit the Background Screening Form.
4. Background checks must be repeated at least every three years for all staff and volunteers.
5. It is important that all records be kept in a locked cabinet. There should be a system in place that gives those who need these records easy access and a safe place to be stored when they are not needed. It is recommended that these records be kept by the church in perpetuity.
6. Persons shall demonstrate an active relationship with FCCB for at least six months before being allowed to be in a supervisory role in activities for children, youth or vulnerable adults. In the case of new staff hires, references deemed adequate by the hiring supervisor will replace the six-month waiting period. An exception may be newer families, with children in the group, deemed by the youth leader as appropriate leaders by their activity and interest over time.

SUPERVISION:

Supervision procedures are designed to reduce the possibility of abuse or exploitation of children, youth, or vulnerable adults, and to protect staff and volunteers from unfounded accusations.

1. Training is a requirement for all staff and volunteers working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. An initial educational component of the Safe Sanctuaries programs and policies is required prior to any adult having direct supervision of children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults. Thereafter, the minimum training would include documentation of an annual review of the Safe Sanctuaries policies, procedures for supervision, and current information on how to identify and report child, youth, or vulnerable adult abuse.
2. Minimum supervisory standards will include the “two adult rule”.
 - a. The “two adult rule” requires that, regardless of the size of the group, there will always be at least two unrelated adults present. Given that certain students of New Hope Tutorials may also be a part of the FCCB youth group, attending classes at the school in the church buildings, short encounters may be rare exceptions.
 - b. Where it is impossible to staff two adults in every room, each room will have one adult plus an additional adult who will serve as a “roamer”. The “roamer” will move in and out of all rooms with one adult, having visual and physical access to each necessary room. This may require that doors remain open.
 - c. In the event of a ministry event where transportation of children, youth, or vulnerable adults is needed, it is recommended that all vehicles have two unrelated adults. When this is not feasible, vehicles, each with their own adult volunteer, must stay in a “carpool/convoy” in sight of all other group vehicles.
 - d. In the absence of an emergency, no adult should be alone in a vehicle with one unrelated child, youth, or vulnerable adult. The only exception to this rule would be when a staff member has been given permission, or encouragement by a parent for the purpose of discipling, mentoring or providing counsel to a youth, as part of a learning, or maturation process.
3. No child, youth, or vulnerable adult will be left unsupervised while attending a ministry activity/event. Activities that revolve around exercises of play, or fun that eliminate a youth from sight momentarily are exceptions to this rule.
4. All ministry activities should occur in open view. Each room or space where ministry activities/events occur must be open to public view. For example: enclosed spaces such as classrooms shall have a viewing window, a glass panel in the door, a ½ door configuration, or an open door.
5. Ministry events involving transportation shall require written/ signed permission from parents/ guardians.
6. No person shall supervise an age group unless he/she is at least 18 years of age or older and is at least 4 years older than the children, youth, or vulnerable adults being supervised. Exceptions may be made for “Junior Volunteers”. (Junior Volunteers must be immediately supervised by an appropriate adult, and do not count toward the “two adult rule”.)

Supervision guidelines for interaction outside of official church activities:

1. It is advised that ministerial staff and volunteers get advanced permission from parent(s)/guardian(s) for their child(ren), youth, and/or vulnerable adult(s) to participate in any outside activity with ministerial staff and/or volunteers.

2. Ministerial staff and volunteers are discouraged from being alone with one unrelated child, youth, or vulnerable adult.
3. All social contact between ministerial staff and/or volunteers and children, youth, or vulnerable adults should happen in public places in plain view of others.

REPORTING:

Reporting is required by any staff or volunteer

- that personally witnesses an incident of abuse or exploitation
- when an allegation of an event of abuse or exploitation is made to them by a third party
- when a child, youth, or vulnerable adult discloses abuse or exploitation to them

It is crucial that reporting be immediate and the allegations dealt with as soon in time as possible to the incident or disclosure. Reporting procedures reflect those of Massachusetts General Laws Part I Title XVII Chapter 119 Section 51A.

1. The staff person or volunteer who observes alleged abuse or to whom such alleged abuse is reported or disclosed, or who suspects abuse is required to report the incident/suspected abuse immediately to the pastor in charge of the ministry/activity. Upon receiving such information, the pastor in charge of the ministry/activity shall immediately contact civil authorities including Social Services and Boxford police. The staff person or volunteer who first received information shall follow up with pastor in charge of the ministry/activity to make sure proper civil authorities were informed.
2. The person in charge of the ministry/activity in which the alleged abuse was observed or disclosed shall immediately attempt to obtain necessary information such as the name of the alleged victim and his/her address and family information.
3. If the accused is the appointed clergy, supply pastor or a member of his/her family, the allegations shall be immediately reported to the Regional Minister, who shall immediately report to the proper authorities as set forth in paragraph 1 above. The Regional Minister will take responsibility and act according to established rules regarding claims against a pastor. If the Regional Minister is not available, the incident should be reported to the National CCCC office.
4. All clergy are included in mandatory reporting as required by Massachusetts Law.
5. After the person in charge of the ministry/activity has reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the appointed clergy/supply pastors are to report the incident immediately to the Regional Minister
6. The staff person or volunteer who witnessed or learned of the abuse shall make him/herself available for a full, truthful account of the facts to the person in charge of the ministry/event, who must keep a written report of the abuse event, and of the steps taken by the Church in response to the reported abuse. The report should be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It should be kept in a secure place. It should be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed. (See form at the end of the document.)

RESPONSE PLAN:

A quick, compassionate, and unified response to an alleged incident of abuse is expected. Allegations will be taken seriously. In all cases of reported or observed abuse there shall be cooperation with all official investigating agencies.

1. All media requests for statements should be directed to the Pastor in charge who shall be in contact with his/her Regional Minister. A spirit of cooperation in helping the media find the “official spokesperson” is often helpful.
2. Immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the accused, remove the accused from further involvement with children, youth, or vulnerable adults and advise the accused there has been an allegation of abuse. Details of the allegations of the abuse should not be discussed with the accused at the time of removal. In any removal of a staff member or volunteer from any activity/ministry, care should be taken to handle the removal in a discreet manner, recognizing that there will be an investigation by either state or church authorities, or both.
3. When it has been alleged that a member of the church staff or a volunteer, has committed an act of abuse or exploitation, the staff member or volunteer shall be required to refrain from all ministry activities/events with children, youth, and vulnerable adults until the incident has been fully resolved by the appropriate state and church authorities.
4. Notify the parents of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety and well being of the child, youth, or vulnerable adult until the parent or guardian arrives. NOTE: If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, follow the advice of the authorities concerning notification of others.
5. Take all allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim’s family. Show care and support to help prevent further hurt. Extend whatever pastoral resources are needed. Remember that the care and safety of the victim is the first priority. Respond in a positive and supportive manner to the victim and the victim’s family.
6. The church should provide a supportive atmosphere to all those who are affected, offering both objectivity and empathy as it seeks to create a climate in which healing can take place.
7. Regional Ministry Contact for the New England Conservative Congregational Christian Conference as of 7/2013 is:
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