

**First Unitarian Church Of Alton  
Board Policy on Child and Youth Protection**

**Purpose:** To protect the children within our care.

**Action taken:** Approved at 7/14/10 Board Meeting

**Introduction**

To help protect children, **First Unitarian Church** has adopted the following Child and Youth Protection Program. It is important that all **First Unitarian Church** paid staff and volunteers understand and implement these guidelines to help prevent sexual abuse against children. The following includes the Purpose and Definitions for these guidelines, the outlines of Protection and Prevention, and an Acknowledgement to be signed by those people working with children.

**Purpose**

These procedures are designed to reduce the risk of child sexual abuse in order to:

1. Provide a safe and secure environment for children, youth, adults, members, volunteers, visitors, and paid staff.
2. Assist **First Unitarian Church** in evaluating a person's suitability to supervise, oversee, and exert control over the activities of children and youth.
3. Satisfy the concerns of parents and staff members with a screening process for paid staff and volunteers.
4. Provide a system to respond to alleged victims of sexual abuse and their families, as well as the alleged perpetrator.
5. Reduce the possibility of false accusations of sexual abuse made against volunteers and paid staff.

**Definitions**

The following terms used herein and are defined as follows:

1. *Paid Staff:* Any pastor, minister, preacher, cleric, or employee who is paid.
2. *Child/Youth/Minor:* Any person who has not reached his/her 18th birthday or the age of majority as defined by state law. "Primary age" applies to children up to and including third grade.
3. *Adult:* Any person who has reached his/her 18th birthday or as defined by state law.

4. *Volunteer*: Means any unpaid person engaged in or involved in activities and who is entrusted with the care and supervision of minors or a person who directly oversees or exerts control or oversight over minors or adults.
5. *Sexual Abuse*: The employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of any minor or adult to engage in, or assist any other person to engage in, any sexually explicit conduct or any simulation of such conduct for the purpose of producing any visual depiction of such conduct or rape, and in cases of caretaker or inter-familial relationships, statutory rape, molestation, prostitution, or other form of sexual exploitation of minor or adult, or incest with a minor or adult, or as defined by federal and state law. This includes and is not limited to unwelcome sexual remarks, jokes, advances, leering, whistling, or sexual gestures; sexual touching, fondling, molestation, assault, or other intimate physical contact; compelling another person to engage in a sexual act by threats or fear or undue influence; and providing or displaying pornographic materials to another person.
6. *Sexual Offender*: an individual identified on the Illinois State sex offender registry or an individual, whether identified on that registry or the sex offender registry of some other state, who meets the criteria of the Illinois State sex offender registry.
7. *Child Emotional Abuse*: Verbal or nonverbal conduct including mental exploitation, degrading communication, or humiliating or threatening conduct that may or may not include bullying or as defined by state law.

## **Protection and Prevention**

### **Volunteer and Employee Screening Procedures**

The following screening procedures are to be used with paid staff and volunteers who are entrusted with the care and supervision of minors or a person who directly oversees or exerts control or oversight over minors. All information collected will be maintained in confidence.

1. *Employment Application and Volunteer Application*: Any paid staff and volunteers who will work with a minor must complete the Employment Application or the Volunteer Application, as applicable. The release statement attached to the Application must be signed by the individual completing the Application to apply for and qualify for service.

Our Employment Application includes questions regarding:

- Current and previous residence addresses.
- Current and previous employment, including addresses, dates, duties, titles, and reasons for leaving.
- Names and addresses of schools attended and degree(s) earned.
- References from previous employers and organizations that serve children.
- Pending criminal charges (where not prohibited by state law).
- Criminal history information.

Our Volunteer Application includes questions regarding:

- Current address.

- Volunteer experience.
- Criminal history information.
- Personal references.

Applications include a statement, which the applicant should acknowledge in writing, certifying that statements provided in the application are true and complete, and any misrepresentation or omission may be grounds for rejection of the applicant or for dismissal if he or she is employed. This statement authorizes **First Unitarian Church** to contact any individual or organization listed in the application.

2. *Review Applications.* Review all statements made in the application, paying specific attention to any gaps in time and irregular employment patterns or unexplained absence. Pursue these gaps with employers listed and in a subsequent interview.
3. *Interviews.* Conduct interviews with qualified applicants for paid staff positions.

If detrimental information is uncovered but the applicant remains desirable, discuss this information with the applicant. In the event the applicant is ultimately hired, the reasons for disregarding the detrimental information must be documented.

Whenever possible, **First Unitarian Church** will have two church representatives participate in the interview with the applicant.

2. *Contact References.* Contact all listed references and employers for paid staff. Inquire as to the reason the applicant left and ask for any information that might help determine the applicant's suitability for the position. If a response is not received within a reasonable period of time, follow up. Notes should be kept of all reference checks with potential employees.
2. *Criminal Background Check:* **First Unitarian Church** will conduct a criminal background check on all paid staff and volunteers who are entrusted with the care and supervision of minors. All criminal background checks will be updated annually.
2. *Six-Month Rule:* All volunteers will be required to have been a Friend or Member of **First Unitarian Church** for six months and have reviewed and signed (a) the Code of Ethics for Adults and Older Youth Working with Children and Youth, and (b) Religious Educators and Youth Group Leaders Agreement to Teach. The Six-Month Rule may be waived on a case-by-case basis by the RE Committee.

## **Confidentiality**

Information obtained through the screening, application, reference check, interview, and criminal background check will be kept in confidence, unless otherwise required by law. The information will be used exclusively for the purpose of conducting a background check. This information will be available only to those responsible for screening staff or volunteers or participating in a response team, or as required by law. All information discovered or obtained through the above-referenced means will be kept in a secure location in the Church office and access to it will be restricted to those with a need-to-know. These materials will be archived.

## Supervision Procedures

Unless an extenuating situation exists, **First Unitarian Church**:

1. **INSERT???** Unless contracting with a licensed/bonded agency for childcare, will provide a camera within the nursery to monitor activities for the protection of the adult volunteers overseeing children.
2. Will have adequate number of screened and trained paid staff or volunteers present at events involving minors. Supervision will increase in proportion to the risk of the activity.
3. Will monitor facilities during activities involving children.
4. Will release primary age minors only to a parent or guardian or a person authorized by the parent or guardian.
5. Will obtain written parental permission, including a signed medical treatment form and list of emergency contacts, before taking minors on trips.
6. Will provide information to parents or guardians before any trips off church property.
7. Will require that young children be accompanied to the restroom and the paid staff or volunteer wait outside the facility to escort the child back to the activity. Whenever possible, the escort will be the same sex as the minor.
8. Will encourage minors to use a "buddy system" whenever minors go on trips off of **First Unitarian Church** property.
9. Will screen all paid staff and volunteers and approve those individuals in advance for any overnight activities.

## Behavioral Guidelines for Religious Organization Paid Staff & Volunteers

All volunteers and paid staff will observe the following guidelines:

1. Do not provide alcoholic beverages, tobacco, drugs, contraband, or anything that is prohibited by law to minors.
2. To the extent possible, **First Unitarian Church** events that are co-educational will have both male and female chaperones.
3. ~~Whenever possible, (struck by Board on 10-22-2011)~~ at least two unrelated paid staff or volunteers will be in the room when minors are present. With the exception of the nursery and pre-kindergarten/kindergarten rooms, doors will be left fully open if one adult needs to leave the room temporarily and during arrival to the class or event before both adults are present.

4. Avoid all inappropriate touching with minors. All touching shall be based on the needs of the individual being touched, not on the needs of the volunteer or paid staff. In the event a minor initiates inappropriate touching, inform the minor that such touching is inappropriate.
5. Never engage in physical discipline of a minor. Volunteers and paid staff shall not abuse minors in any way, including but not limited to physical abuse, verbal/mental abuse, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse of any kind.
6. If you recognize an inappropriate relationship developing between a minor and adult, maintain clear professional boundaries and refer the minor to another individual with supervisory authority.
7. When one-on-one pastoral care is necessary, avoid meeting in isolated environments.
8. If you observe abuse of a minor or inappropriate conduct, report it to the Minister, Director of Religious Education, or the President of the **First Unitarian Church**.

### **Disqualification**

No person may be entrusted with the care and supervision of minors or may directly oversee or exert control or oversight over minors who has been convicted of the offenses outlined below, been on a probated sentence or received deferred adjudication for any offense outlined below, or has presently pending any criminal charges for any offense outlined below until a determination of guilt or innocence has been made, including any person who is presently on deferred adjudication, unless the conviction is more than ten (10) years in the past, and the person served less than a year's time for such offense. The following offenses disqualify a person from care, supervision, control, or oversight of minors:

1. Any offense against minors as defined by state law.
2. A misdemeanor or felony offense as defined by state law that is classified as sexual assault, indecency with a minor or adult, assault of a minor or adult, injury to a minor or adult, abandoning or endangering a minor, sexual performance with a minor or adult, possession or promoting child pornography, enticing a minor, bigamy, incest, drug-related offenses, or family violence.
3. A prior criminal history of an offense against minors.

### **Sexual Offender at First Unitarian Church**

**First Unitarian Church** may allow a person known to be a sexual offender to remain or become a member of the congregation but they must adhere to specific guidelines.

A known sexual offender must report in and be assigned to an escort who will accompany him or her at all times, provided, however, that sexual offenders whose underlying offenses did not involve violence or crimes against minors may seek dispensation from this provision from the RE Committee

## Response to Sexual Abuse

**First Unitarian Church** will respond promptly to investigate any accusation of sexual abuse. All accusations of sexual abuse will be taken seriously. It is important to be appropriately respectful to the needs and feelings of those who allege sexual abuse and those who have been accused of sexual abuse.

When an allegation is made involving sexual abuse, the person reporting the complaint is to be told about the guidelines and the procedures to be followed. The Minister will make an initial assessment of credibility. If the Minister is the individual accused of sexual abuse, then the President of the Board of Directors will make the assessment of credibility. The steps below shall be followed:

1. Where required by law, the minister or other mandated reporter shall report the incident to appropriate authorities in accordance with the state mandatory reporting laws.<sup>1</sup> Should the Minister or the President of the Board of Directors believe that a crime involving sexual abuse has occurred, the Minister or the President of the Board of Directors, as applicable, shall report the suspected crime to the authorities, whether or not they are so mandated by state mandatory reporting laws.
2. Report the matter to **First Unitarian Church's** insurance carrier.
3. Cooperate with authorities and the insurance carrier.
4. **First Unitarian Church** shall suspend (with pay for paid staff) the alleged offender during any investigation or legal proceeding, beyond the initial assessment of credibility.
5. An official of **First Unitarian Church** (and legal counsel or other consultants) will meet with the governing body of **First Unitarian Church** and present a report on the initial

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<sup>1</sup> The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services protective services abuse or neglect hotline is: Child Abuse Hotline (800) 25-ABUSE, or 217-524-2606. The Hotline is located at the Department's State Central Register in Springfield.

The state defines child abuse and neglect as the “mistreatment of a child under the age of 18 by a parent, caretaker, someone living in their home or someone who works with or around children. Child abuse can be physical (such as burns or broken bones), sexual (such as fondling or incest), or emotional. Neglect happens when a parent or responsible caretaker fails to provide adequate supervision, food, clothing, shelter or other basics for a child.”

Further authoritative information from the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services may be obtained at:

<http://www.state.il.us/dcf/child/index.shtml#reporters>  
<http://www.state.il.us/DCFS/docs/CFS%201050-21%20Mandated%20Reporter%20Manual.pdf>

The Minister, Director of Religious Education, and our professional child care workers are mandatory reporters.

assessment of credibility, any actions taken, and any recommendations for further action in response to the allegation of abuse.

6. An official of **First Unitarian Church** will meet with the alleged perpetrator and notify him/her of the results of the initial assessment of credibility and recommendations for actions, provided such meeting does not interfere with any pending criminal proceeding.
7. An official of **First Unitarian Church** will meet with the alleged victim, along with his/her parents or guardians, and notify them of the results of the initial assessment of credibility and recommendations for actions.
8. During the investigation and any subsequent legal proceedings, an official of **First Unitarian Church** shall maintain contact with the alleged victim and his/her parents or legal guardian, and inform them of the actions taken and assist them in their process of healing.
9. An official of **First Unitarian Church** (and legal counsel or other consultants) may meet with the alleged perpetrator, the alleged victim, and any others with knowledge of relevant facts, provided such meetings do not interfere with any pending criminal proceedings.
10. Communicate with criminal and civil legal counsel of **First Unitarian Church**.
11. Communicate with those affected by the ministry of the alleged perpetrator.
11. Hire a consultant or assign a spokesperson to respond to media or prepare a statement for the media if the need shall arise, subject to the approval of First Unitarian Church's attorney.