



First Congregational United Church of Christ

SAFE CONDUCT POLICY AND PROCEDURE

Contents

1	Introduction	3
2	Selection and Recruitment of Workers	4
3	Training.....	4
4	Supervision and Conduct	5
5	Transportation	7
6	Travel.....	8
7	Website Safety	9
8	Reporting Abuse or Neglect	10
9	Additional Considerations Regarding Facilities.....	12
10	Education and Review.....	14
11	Sexual Offender Policy.....	16
12	Outside Groups	19

First Congregational United Church of Christ
SAFE CONDUCT POLICY AND PROCEDURE

Our Mission

We believe God calls us to:
Embody a forward-thinking, courageous, and diverse Christian community.
Follow the ways of Jesus the Christ as a grace-filled spiritual congregation.
Practice affirming and radical hospitality.
Engage our global and local community with acts of love, mercy, peace, and justice.

1 Introduction

MISSION

As stated in our mission and in the implementation of our By-Laws, First Congregational United Church of Christ (FCUCC) seeks to be a place of compassion, justice, and peace. While we strive for these ideals in the context of our faith and spiritual values, it is up to each of us who worships, works, volunteers, or socializes at FCUCC to create a community that is a place of Sanctuary, free of discrimination, harassment, or any form of exploitation or intimidation.

With this in mind, FCUCC supports principles of Safe Conduct, which include individual responsibility to fulfill the highest standards of personal conduct toward others and to lead and guide the congregation into well-being through our Christian faith. This includes specific policies and procedures designed to protect participants from sexual, physical, and/or emotional abuse.

We seek to provide an environment that promotes the safety and spiritual growth of everyone, especially our children, youth, and vulnerable adults and including all those who work with them. FCUCC strongly opposes and prohibits any form of sexual, physical, and/or emotional abuse regardless of age, sex, sexual orientation, sexual identification, or mental capacity. It is the intention of our congregation to affirmatively nurture good behavior, to prevent and correct behavior that is contrary to this policy, and, as necessary, to discipline those persons who violate this policy.

2 Selection and Recruitment of Workers

All adults supervising children/youth, whether volunteer or paid, will complete an application and sign a statement of willingness to submit to a criminal background check from local and, when appropriate, state and national law enforcement agencies. (These background checks may be provided by law enforcement agencies or by the use of an approved investigative agency). An updated application will be required every three (3) years.

The collection of the documents required by this policy shall be maintained in confidence, in a secure locked location, by a designated staff person and/or the Pastor.

All staff of the church, including clergy/Pastoral staff, will be required to have a criminal background check. The Personnel Committee will request these background checks and contact references for all staff applications.

If the Personnel Committee concludes that any applicant poses a substantial threat to the children or youth and has any prior history of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse directed against another person, the applicant will be removed from consideration.

3 Training

The church will provide training in the Safe Conduct Policy and Procedure (SCPP) for new staff and volunteers involved in working with children/youth. Thereafter, all teachers/supervisors will be re-trained yearly.

All adult volunteers and staff shall sign a covenant agreement to follow these policies and procedures.

It will be the responsibility of the Pastor or his/her designee, to monitor periodic re-training and signed agreements.

The Youth Minister (when one exists) will be responsible for training teaching volunteers and informing parents of our SCPP.

4 Supervision and Conduct

4.1 Requirements

Adult volunteers and staff will not date or be intimately involved with youth less than 18 years old.

Children/youth at all times must be supervised by a responsible adult at least eighteen (18) years of age to lessen the likelihood of any situation that could result in injury, abuse, or neglect.

- This does NOT prohibit youth that are less than 18 years old from participating as a “helper” for the activity.

No adult will be alone in the Church, or at a church scheduled activity, with a child/youth that is not his or her own, or a relative, without written permission of the child’s or children’s parent or guardian.

1. “Two Adult Principle”: A minimum of two adults should be identified to chaperone any church sponsored program or event involving children/youth. When possible, the two adults should be unrelated. If the “Two Adult Principle” is not realistically feasible, the door to the classroom or other event venue must remain open or have a glass panel. The Floater Principle should also be followed.
2. “Floater Principle”: During any church activity where the “Two Adult Principle” cannot realistically be achieved, an additional person must be designated as a “Floater” and should make unscheduled visits to check on all classrooms or areas.
3. “The Buddy System”: Parents, teachers, and leaders of anyone under the age of 18 are encouraged to make prior arrangements and/or pairing assignments so that children and youth have a “buddy” who is close to their age so that no child need be alone while in the church building, or while on any activity, trip, or overnight.

Adults will use positive/appropriate touch at all times, recognizing that touch can convey strong messages and that different children are comfortable with different levels of physical interaction.

4.2 Guidelines

Touch

With regard to touch, the Two Adult Rule is particularly important. In situations where a child is angry, upset, needing comfort or distance, a second adult should be within visual or hearing range of the adult and child. If there is any question of the child's safety, the parent or guardian will be asked to come immediately to be with the child.

1. Wrestling and tickling make use of touch in a potentially abusive way and are inappropriate.
2. In general, the child should initiate hugs and hugs should be brief and from the side rather than the front.
3. Touch should not be used to discipline a child.

Communication and Advance Notice to Parents

Reasonable measures should be taken so that parents can be informed regarding the events and programs in which their children and youth are involved. Advance notice and information will be communicated regarding any activity which deviates from the routine programs offered by the church.

Permission Forms

Permission forms with medical information must be completed annually for children/youth participating in any programs offered by the church. Forms will be kept on file in the administrative office. These forms must accompany children/youth for any off-site activities.

Restroom Use

1. Children who are able to use the toilet independently are to use the restroom alone, closing the door of the room or stall.
2. Teachers are encouraged to note how long a child is away from the activity and send a floater to check on the child if concerned.
3. It is encouraged that a parent or guardian accompanies any child/youth needing assistance in the restroom. If this is not possible, a second adult (or floater) should be within visual or hearing range of the teacher assisting the child. (This also applies to changing diapers.)

5 Transportation

Rationale

Transporting children and youth is an important task requiring deliberate care and consideration of specific risks for children and youth.

Requirements

1. Drivers will be designated prior to an event requiring transportation and must receive training under, and sign receipt of, this Safe Conduct Policy and Procedure.
2. When a child/youth is transported in a vehicle not owned by the church, the driver will be either the child/youth's parent/guardian, an approved adult volunteer, or a paid staff person who is 18 years of age or older. With parental permission a driver may transport a child/youth without a second adult.
3. All drivers will have a valid driver's license and insurance for the vehicle being operated (such as a commercial license for a church bus). A copy of the driver's license and proof of insurance will be made and maintained on file at the church.
4. All vehicles transporting children/youth must have a first aid kit.
5. Drivers will require seat belts and/or age-appropriate car/booster seats to be used at all times and the number of passengers will not exceed the number of seat belts.
6. No one under the age of 12 will be allowed to ride in the front seat, unless all other vehicle seats are taken.
7. Drivers should agree upon a designated route and should not deviate from it except in cases of emergency or road detours.
8. Drivers will not talk or text on their phone.
9. Children/youth should not ride in a vehicle driven by another youth to or from a church-sponsored activity without parental consent.
10. When a road trip is planned of 100 miles or more, drivers will be listed on the "approved driver list" maintained in the church office.
11. In order to be listed on the "approved driver list", a driving record will be obtained from the NC Department of Transportation Division of Motor Vehicles and the pastor or designee must approve those drivers listed.
12. Approved Drivers must read and sign a form indicating that the Safe Conduct Policy and Procedure has been read and will be followed.

Additional Guidelines

1. Whenever feasible, drivers should be accompanied by or travel with another vehicle driven by at least one other adult.

6 Travel

Requirements

The person supervising youth/children on an overnight trip or retreat shall carry parental permission slips including permission for emergency medical care.

No child/youth will share a bed with a non-relative adult.

While on a trip or retreat, children/youth may not be transported by anyone other than designated trip leaders.

Any teaching or educational experience that requires travel from the church or overnight travel must have the written permission and insurance information from the parent or guardian of each child/youth, and where necessary, the approval of the pastor. The permission/medical information file must stay with the coordinator for the entire trip.

The "Two Adult Principle" must be observed for any off-site activities.

No youth who arrived with a designated trip leader or driver may leave with any other person, other than their parent, without parental consent.

Additional Guidelines

If a child/youth travels alone with an adult/advisor, parental consent must be provided.

When meeting with an individual child/youth for consideration of disciplinary action, two (2) adults should be present.

In a hotel-type setting, rooms should be assigned according to the following priorities:

- Separate rooms for adults and children/youth with at least 2 children/youth per room.
- An adult room between 2 children/youth rooms.
- Adults will monitor the hallways and common areas and make room checks at night. Whenever feasible, lodging should be selected which is constructed so that lodging rooms do not open to the outside of the building.
- Males and females will be housed in separate rooms or all participants may be housed together with appropriate measures taken for privacy.
- Sensitive consideration will be made for children/youth regarding gender identity and sexual orientation issues.

Insurance

The church will maintain liability insurance for its facilities (and for church vehicles, if any) in case of accident or injury to anyone participating in a church-sponsored activity, as well as coverage for sexual and other forms of abuse.

7 Website Safety

The FCUCC website will observe the rules established by the Federal Trade Commission's 1998 Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (or COPPA).

Only approved staff or adult volunteers may have church website responsibilities including updating web content and utilizing the website for email correspondence. As such, they will observe the communications policies established to protect our children and youth. No child/youth will have an unsupervised church website responsibility.

The church website will not disclose contact or personal identification information for any youth/child including phone number, home address, email information, etc. The only publicly available contact information at the website will be the church address, phone, fax, and "alias" email addresses. At no time should the full names of children/youth be disclosed.

Although photos can often depict the excitement and energy of church activities, the church must be sensitive to potential adverse impacts of publishing photos of youth/children. Therefore, photos of groups that minimize unique identifying participant characteristics are preferred over close-up photos of youth/children. For published photos, descriptions will be limited to describing the activity depicted. At no time will youth or children be identified by their full name.

8 Reporting Abuse or Neglect

Definitions

1. Abuse is defined as: acts of physical or sexual abuse against a child under the age of 18 years.
2. Physical abuse is physical contact which leaves marks on the body, whether during an act of discipline or not.
3. Sexual Abuse is defined as: inappropriate touching, fondling, or molestation of a child, or allowing another person to do so. It also includes exposing oneself to a child.
4. Neglect is defined as: not providing adequate basic needs for safety and well-being, such as food, clothing appropriate to the weather, shelter, education, or meeting the medical needs of a child in your care. Lack of appropriate supervision according to the child's age is also neglect.
5. Dependency is defined as: a child having no adult to provide care for them, such as through abandonment, death, imprisonment, or lack of responsible adult.

Reporting

North Carolina child abuse laws require mandatory reporting by any person or institution of abuse, neglect, dependency, or death due to maltreatment.

https://www.ncleg.net/EnactedLegislation/Statutes/HTML/BySection/Chapter_7B/GS_7B-301.html

When abuse, neglect, or dependency is suspected in a child's home, the Buncombe County Department of Social Services must be contacted. The number for DSS is (828) 250-5500 or 252-HELP on a cell phone. After 5:00 pm on weekdays, or on holidays or weekends, call 211.

- When abuse is suspected by someone outside the child's home and family, the police must be contacted.
- If the incident happens on church grounds or on church activities, and if someone from the Pastoral staff is available, notify that staff member immediately.
- If you do not feel comfortable making the call to DSS by yourself you may ask the Pastoral staff person to assist in this. It is important to maintain confidentiality of information and share information only with the Pastoral staff person at the Church.
- It is also important not to delay, impede, or interfere with an investigation undertaken by DSS. Let the trained personnel of that department do their job, including initiating and completing the entire investigation and necessary contacts. They will talk with the people involved.

- Limit your facts finding to minimize the possibility that your contact with involved persons might influence the investigation.

REMEMBER:

- The phone call and the information given are confidential.
- The social worker answering the Intake line will ask many questions. This is important and necessary to determine if the reported incident meets the legal definition of abuse, neglect, or dependency under the North Carolina statutes.
- You do not have to give your name and an anonymous report can still be taken. However, if you make an anonymous report, the social worker will be unable to call you back to gain follow-up information or clarification.
- Also, a letter is sent to the reporter letting you know the disposition of the report.
- You may not know the answer to every question asked.
- The basic information requested will be: name, address, date of birth or age of child(ren), school attended, perpetrator's name, address, phone number, other people living in the home of the child, and a description of the events about which you are calling.
- Be prepared to have your information questioned and to be asked for additional details. This is not to doubt your information, but to further clarify the circumstances.

Congregational Care and Support

- The Pastor (or Moderator if the Pastor is the accused abuser) will offer support to the victim and their family, including offers to provide for counseling and other care.
- The Pastor (or Moderator) will send a letter to the congregation briefly explaining the incident and action taken by the church, taking every precaution to protect the identity of the victim and the accused abuser.
- The letter should include a statement of actions taken to assure the safety of all the children and youth and to assure the congregation's continuing ability to provide ministry to children and youth.
- It is strongly recommended that the Pastor and/or Moderator call a congregational meeting at which time the Pastor and/or Moderator will inform those present of the action(s) taken.
- It is also recommended that the Personnel Committee (or Board) be utilized in the planning of the congregational meeting and that those present would include the Pastor, the Moderator, and a qualified counselor who is not a member of the church.

9 Additional Considerations Regarding Facilities

Classrooms

Classrooms or areas being used by children/youth will have either a split door or a glass panel in the door to allow for outside monitoring. This glass panel must not be covered, nor should the upper half of a split door be closed, in order to allow monitoring of all spaces within the classroom or area. If a children/youth activity is held in any room not having a window in the door, then the door to the room must remain open during all aspects of the activity.

Rooms for Pastoral Counseling

Any room where pastoral counseling of a child or youth is regularly performed should have a glass window in the door. An open door policy may also be used when necessary. Counseling is expected to be confidential in nature but it is preferred that such sessions take place where other people are nearby, though not within hearing distance.

First Aid Considerations

1. **First Aid Kits:** First aid kits will be maintained in readily accessible areas where the need is most likely to rise. These areas include nursery, preschool/extended session, the sanctuary narthex, church office, the kitchen, the friendship hall, and youth classrooms. The church will maintain signs in each classroom and office directing people to the location of the nearest first aid kit. This information will also be provided to anyone using the church for any activity.
2. **CPR/First Aid Training:** All employees, especially those working with children/youth, shall obtain and maintain CPR/First Aid certification through the Red Cross or similar organization.
3. **Evacuation Routes:** Fire evacuation routes will be posted by the doors in all classrooms, offices, and activity rooms. Exit doors will be marked by illuminated "Exit" signs.
4. **Fire Extinguishers:** Appropriate fire extinguishers will be installed at convenient locations in all church buildings. Fire extinguisher locations will be indicated on the fire evacuation route posters. Fire extinguishers and smoke alarms will be checked and maintained periodically and after each use.
5. **Emergency Phone numbers:** Emergency telephone numbers will be posted at each church telephone. These numbers will include 911 for emergencies, Asheville Police non-emergency number, Poison Control, and Department of Social Services (DSS). Also included will be the church address and phone number and the location within the building of the phone.

6. Age and Activity Appropriate Play Equipment: All equipment used in the nursery, classrooms, youth area, and playground will be initially evaluated and periodically re-evaluated for integrity, safety, and age appropriateness.

10 Education and Review

Safe Conduct Policy and Procedure (SCPP) requires planning and preparation. The success of these policies requires the establishment of an effective educational strategy to inform the congregation and train staff and volunteers. Our educational strategy aims to be systematic (targeting the entire congregation, while focusing on staff, volunteers, and lay leadership) and sustainable (included in annual training programs as staff and leadership changes over time).

Governing Board

1. The Board will receive orientation and annual updates regarding the SCPP at the Board orientation that takes place at the beginning of the church year. The orientation and update will be provided by the Senior Pastor or his/her designee.
2. Orientation will include education about the underlying considerations, especially the risks of child physical and sexual abuse and the church's role in minimizing the risks of abuse, our policies, and the legal basis for policy decisions.
3. The Board will acknowledge and participate in promoting the SCPP.
4. The Board will be responsible for directing the ministry team leaders to meet annually to review the SCPP with staff and recommend appropriate changes. This annual meeting should be scheduled so that any changes can be made before fall programming begins.

Families

1. During the first Parent Gathering of the Sunday school year, the Youth Minister or a designated youth/children leader will provide an overview of the Safe Conduct Policy and Procedure.
2. The feedback of parents regarding the SCPP will be solicited annually to assist staff and the Board in reviewing and recommending periodic improvements to the policy.

Adult Survivors of Abuse

1. The church will consider opportunities to implement programs for the care and support of adult survivors of abuse.

Staff and Paid Childcare Workers

1. Staff and paid childcare workers will annually review the SCPP and sign a receipt form.
2. New staff and paid childcare workers will receive training in the SCPP to be provided by the Personnel Committee or staff.

3. All staff and paid childcare workers will consent to a background check.
4. Staff will be involved in education and training for the Board, families, and volunteers.

Volunteers

1. All volunteers working with children or youth will annually review the SCPP and sign a receipt form.
2. Sunday school teachers, youth group leaders, and supervisors will receive training in the SCPP at a time determined by staff.
3. The feedback of volunteers regarding the SCPP will be solicited to assist staff and the Board in reviewing and recommending periodic improvements to the policy.

Congregation

1. New Members and Visitor Orientation will include the SCPP.
2. The SCPP will be available in the church office and a copy available upon request.
3. The SCPP will be posted on the website.

11 Sexual Offender Policy

As a community of faith, who are reflective of our mission, we seek to attend to the needs of all who seek healing, redemption, and mutual support among us. We are prepared to accept in our midst those deemed as sex offenders, in order to provide them refuge and peace in their recovery and penitence. We acknowledge that there are risks to be borne in our deliberate association with and ministry to sex offenders. We agree to honor the needs of the congregation and our community to have reasonable assurance that a sex offender in our care will not have an opportunity to re-offend as a result of lapses in our supervision of the offender. Diligently, we commit to doing so for the welfare of our congregation, collectively and individually, and the community we serve.

We will consider limited participation or membership of a sex offender in our congregation with utmost care. In doing so, the sex offender must agree to the following:

- Given that criminal convictions are a matter of public record, there will be no expectation of secrecy on the part of the offender. As a condition of participation in our faith community, the offender must agree that the leadership of FCUCC will make it known to the members, constituencies, and customers of FCUCC that we have accepted among us a sex offender. The conditions and limitations that apply to participation in the life of the church will be known to all.
- We will consider and understand the character of the crimes which have resulted in requiring an individual to register as a sex offender (if applicable), the passage of time without repeated conduct or behavior, and the risk and opportunity of re-offending that is presented by the particular programs of our congregation.
- We will abide by the current statutory limitations applying in the State of North Carolina to the movement and activities of a sex offender, considering the programs of the church or the operations of tenants.
- We will abide by the limitations and prohibitions placed upon the sex offender by courts and probation authorities. If available, the opinion of a mental health professional, regarding the suitability of the person to participate in the life of the church, will be obtained. In all cases where probation is in force, we will obtain the explicit approval of and conditions of participation specified by the probation officer. A recommendation by law enforcement or mental health professionals to deny participation to an offender will be seriously considered.

- With the advice of legal counsel, and in all cases, the conditions of participation by a sex offender will be defined by a “Limited Access Agreement” executed by the offender and FCUCC. With the advice and prior approval by the Church Board, it will be signed only by the Senior Pastor who will have oversight and general responsibility in the supervision of the offender, in all of the activities in relation to the church. The Senior Pastor will approve all Designated Accompanying adults selected by the sex offender and consider their willingness to fulfill all of the elements of specific supervision. The elements of specific supervision shall include the following:
 - Knowledge of the terms of the Limited Access Agreement, including activity limitations placed upon the offender.
 - Knowledge of and a signed receipt for the Safe Conduct Policy and Procedure.
 - Knowledge of the offender’s offense history sufficient to understand the risks of association with the church and its ministries.
 - Willingness to assert activity limitations, to intervene in any onset of risky or problematic behavior, and to report to the Senior Pastor any violation of restrictions placed upon the offender.

Such agreement shall be approved by probation authorities, if applicable. The agreement shall be reviewed annually to validate ongoing eligibility. **Violation of the agreement by the offender shall be considered as grounds for immediate cancellation of the agreement.**

The following considerations shall also apply:

- If the victim of the sex offender is a member of the congregation, employee, or a client of other services provided by the congregation, the sex offender shall not be permitted to attend FCUCC or its activities.
- “Clergy-penitent privilege” does not prevent clergy from informing the congregation of matters which may be relevant to their safety; it does not require clergy to hold information in secrecy.
- Conditions of limited access for a sex offender will commonly require that the offender be accompanied by a designated person at all times, while on the church premises or at church events elsewhere. The designated person shall not be a spouse, partner, or relative of the offender.
- FCUCC members who are employed in certain occupations may have a statutory obligation to maintain privacy around the criminal history of their clients who may also be congregants. Such members will decline to accept leadership roles which may put them in a position of decision-making regarding individuals who may be their professional clients.

- If the offender is a juvenile, it is understood that the criminal record is ordinarily concealed by the courts but that the Church may come to know the juvenile's history by other means.
- Honest disclosure by a juvenile and parents may reveal that a record exists without knowing the specifics. While a Limited Access Agreement will be required for the juvenile, every precaution will be taken to preserve the privacy and confidentiality, which the law affords a juvenile.

12 Outside Groups

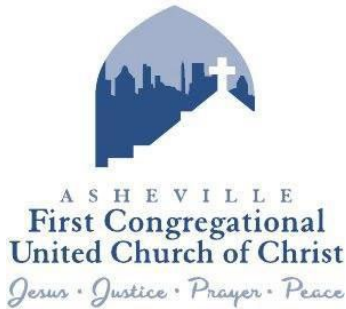
All outside groups using the church facilities will be provided a copy of these policies and procedures in advance of any event and an approved representative of any such group must sign a statement acknowledging that they have read and will abide by the provisions stated in this policy.

All signed covenants will be maintained by the church's administrative assistant under the direction of the Board.

Sexual Offender Policy for Outside Groups using FCUCC Facilities

As a community of faith we seek to attend to the needs of all who seek healing, redemption, and mutual support within support groups that use our facility for their meetings. We are prepared to accept in our midst those deemed as sex offenders, in order to provide them refuge and peace in their recovery and penitence. We acknowledge that there are risks to be borne in our deliberate association with and ministry to sex offenders. For the safety of our congregation and community we request that these conditions be followed:

1. A known sex offender is never allowed to be alone in the building or on the grounds.
2. Supervision cannot be a relative, spouse, or partner. The group will designate a responsible adult to accompany this person on the grounds or in the building.
3. The group coordinator will be aware of this person's status and see that there is no opportunity for re-offending while on/in FCUCC property.



Signatory Page
 Acknowledgement of Safe Conduct Policy and Procedure

Staff, Paid Childcare Workers, or Volunteer Agreement

I have reviewed the Safe Conduct Policy and Procedure of First Congregational UCC and agree to abide by its provisions. Failure to honor its terms will result in my being denied access to the church property and all church events and termination of employment.

Date: _____ Classification: _____

Printed Name: _____

Signature: _____



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF SAFE CONDUCT POLICY AND PROCEDURE

All outside groups who rent or use the church facilities on a long-term basis will receive a copy of the Safe Conduct Policy and Procedure. Groups must agree to comply with its provisions as it pertains to their use of the building, and they will sign the Statement of Compliance. This documentation will be maintained by the Administrative Coordinator for the Board.

Statement of Compliance

I acknowledge that as a representative of the organization below I have read and understand the First Congregational UCC of Asheville’s Safe Conduct Policy and Procedure and that we agree to comply with them. Failure to follow the policies may result in the termination of my right and that of the organization that I represent to use church facilities.

Current signature

Outside Group – Renters Agreement

I have reviewed the Safe Conduct Policy and Procedure of First Congregational UCC and agree to abide by its provisions. Failure to honor its terms will result in the group I represent being denied access to the church property and all church events.

Date: _____

Representative Printed Name: _____

Representative Signature: _____

Group Name: _____