

FCCGE Safe Sanctuary Policy 2025

Created: 02/13/2025

Last Edited: 02/13/2025

Published: 02/13/2025

First Congregational Church Glen Ellyn (IL)

Section: Introduction

First Congregational Church of Glen Ellyn, United Church of Christ is an open, diverse, intergenerational congregation of Christian people engaged in a continuing spiritual journey. We believe that there are many ways to experience and understand God. We invite everyone to join us in this search.

At baptism, this question is posed to the congregation: *"Do you, who witness and celebrate this sacrament, promise your love, support and care to the one(s) about to be baptized, as he/she/they live and grow in Christ?"* And with all honesty and intention, *"we promise our love, support and care."*

As adults, we promise to nurture our children in Christ. Providing this nurturance in a safe environment is part of our responsibility as disciples. Towards that end, the members of the First Congregational Church have adopted this policy on **Safe Sanctuary** prohibiting sexual misconduct and other forms of abusive behavior and establishing guidelines for staff and volunteers who minister to children and youth. The intent of this policy is to prevent abusive and/or inappropriate behavior within our church and to address such conduct should it occur.

Section: Policy Mission/Purpose Statement

At First Congregational Church of Glen Ellyn, we do everything in our power to prevent physical, emotional, and sexual abuse against children, youth, and vulnerable adults involved in ministry and related activities. We are committed to providing a safe and secure environment for everyone involved in serving and participating in activities. The purpose of this protection policy is to demonstrate our commitment through written procedures and expectations in all areas of service. This commitment includes procedures involved in selecting staff and volunteers, training and screening those who serve, establishing safe facility recommendations, and clearly defining our process for reporting suspected abuse.

Each person serving will acknowledge receipt of this policy by verifying they have read and understand this policy. This policy will be made available to any member or parent/ guardian upon request and is also available on the First Congregational Church of Glen Ellyn website (www.fccge.org). When changes are made to the policy, such changes will be reflected in this policy, as well as communicated to all employees and volunteers affected by the changes. This policy will be updated every two years and as circumstances change. Additional policies may be added that expand on the information presented here.

Section: Employees Working with Children, Youth and/or Vulnerable Adults

First Congregational Church takes seriously its responsibility to provide Christian Education and Youth Ministries for its members and guests in a safe environment. In order to maintain a safe environment, it is our policy to provide adequate supervision of all children and youth activities. Staff and volunteers who work with children and youth must:

1. Annually review this Safe Sanctuary Policy and follow its guidelines for ministry for as long as the staff member or volunteer ministers to children and youth at First Congregational Church.
2. Participate in online Abuse Prevention Training.
3. Complete either a "Volunteer Disclosure Form" (18 years of age & older) OR "Verification of Clear Criminal Record" (completed by parents or guardians of youth 17 years old or younger).
4. Review and sign the Behavior Covenant for use of Digital Media
5. For staff and "high access" volunteers, complete the Safe Gatherings application and certification every two years, including providing references and information for background checks.
6. Complete online IL Mandated Reporter Training and provide proof of certification to church staff every three years.
7. Annually review the First Congregational Church Emergency Procedures online training.

Section: Volunteer and Staff Conduct

All persons engaged in the ministry of First Congregational Church should understand the possible impact of their words and actions on the emotional, mental, and spiritual needs of persons who come to them for help or over whom they have any kind of authority.

Because volunteers and staff often deal with individuals who are emotionally and psychologically vulnerable, it is imperative that those engaged in the ministry model healthy behavior to children and youth. It is the policy of First Congregational Church to encourage its volunteers to nurture safety within ministerial relationships by being attentive to self-care, education, and the importance of referring those in need to supportive and helpful resources. Such resources and referrals are available through our Senior and Associate Pastors and program staff members.

Section: Prohibition of Sexual Misconduct, Abuse and Other Discrimination

First Congregational Church is committed to creating and maintaining an environment in which members, friends, staff and volunteers can worship and work together free of all forms of discrimination, harassment, abuse, exploitation or intimidation. This church is committed to fostering and seeks to provide an environment of hospitality for all persons, all genders, adult or child, which is free of sexual misconduct, free of physical and emotional abuse, and encourages respect, equality, equity, and kinship to Christ. We rejoice in our community of faith, strengthened by diversity, including diversity of culture, economic status, age, ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, and physical or mental abilities. We affirm that God is glorified when we welcome all people to our spiritual community, as Jesus did.

Specifically, all persons associated with First Congregational Church should be aware that the church is strongly opposed to and will not tolerate sexual exploitation and harassment, and that such behavior is prohibited by church policy. It is the intention of the church to take appropriate action needed to prevent and correct behavior that is contrary to this policy and, if necessary, to discipline any person who violates this policy. Sexual harassment of members or other individuals by anyone

engaged in the ministry of First Congregational Church is unethical and unprofessional behavior, and will not be tolerated within this congregation. Sexual exploitation of members or other individuals by anyone engaged in the ministry of First Congregational Church is illegal and will be reported to authorities.

Section: Education

This church commits itself to educating all church leaders, employees, and volunteers who work with minors in our children and youth programs and other ministries within our church on the provisions of our Safe Sanctuary Policy, so that they are aware of their responsibilities within the framework of this policy, the rationale behind the development of this policy and the applicable guidelines to be followed in ministry.

Section: Definitions

Each state has its own statutes regarding the definitions of abuse. In Illinois, the statutes regarding abuse can be found [<https://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=12428>]. For purposes of this policy, we will use the following definitions:

Church/Organization: First Congregational Church of Glen Ellyn, UCC

Staff: Any part-time or full-time paid staff member

Volunteer: Any part-time or full-time non-paid person who serves on occasion

High-Access Volunteer: a volunteer who often interacts or over an extended period with youth in our programs. Such volunteers may be readily known to program participants under their supervision and to other volunteers and staff in the program. They may also supervise children or youth with or without a church staff member present.

Child: Person age 0-11 years (through grade 5)

Youth: Person age 12-17 years

High-Risk Children/Youth: Children or youth who are especially vulnerable to negative interpersonal interactions for various reasons including those who are lonely, troubled, seen as different by other children or youth.

Adult: Person 18 years and older

Vulnerable Adult: Person 18 years or age and older with physical, mental or developmental disabilities

Sexual misconduct/Abuse: Sexual misconduct and other abuses occur when a person exerts their power over others in a way that is harmful, unwelcome and/or inappropriate.

Sexual Exploitation: This occurs when a person engaged in a ministerial relationship in the life or work of the church takes advantage of the emotional, psychological, or other vulnerability of another person within the ministerial relationship in order to engage in sexual behavior with the vulnerable

person. Any form of sexual behavior between an adult and a child as well as any sexual conduct, including sexually suggestive advances, comments or actions, directed by an adult toward a child is sexual exploitation.

Sexual Harassment: This involves coercive or unwelcome sexual advances, request for sexual favors or other conduct of a sexual nature directed toward another person, and includes behavior directed at and about a person's sexuality or sexual orientation with the intent of intimidating, humiliating or harassing the other person, or subjecting the person to public discrimination.

Elder abuse: A term referring to any knowing, intentional or negligent act by a caregiver or any other person that causes harm or a serious risk of harm to a vulnerable adult.

Neglect: The failure of a parent, guardian or other caregiver to provide for a child or youth's basic needs. This can include physical, medical, educational and/or emotional neglect.

Physical abuse: Nonaccidental physical injury inflicted by a parent, guardian or other person who has responsibility for the child or youth.

Emotional Abuse: Involves verbal or nonverbal violence toward a child or other person that includes using harsh, abusive language meant to revile, malign or hurt someone.

Bullying: Unwanted aggressive behavior, especially when there is an observed or perceived power imbalance. Bullying can be one time but generally the behavior is repeated over time.

Physical Contact will promote a positive, nurturing environment while protecting children, staff and volunteers from misunderstandings. Please carefully follow the guidelines below:

- **Appropriate touch:** Depending on the person and age group, examples can include a side hug, shoulder-to-shoulder hugs, high five, fist bump, handshake, pat on the shoulder, back or head (when culturally appropriate), sitting on the knee of an adult or youth leader, and in some cases holding hands to comfort someone or to minister to young children. Appropriate touch is done in the presence of others and meant to make the recipient feel affirmed, cared for, comforted, supported, and good about who they are.
- **Inappropriate touch:** Examples include prolonged touch anywhere on the body, or touch using any part of one's own body on sensitive spots of another (buttocks, chest, genitals, thigh, etc.). Inappropriate touch also includes any touch that is done for the pleasure of the adult. This type of touch can make a person feel confused, violated, disregarded, harmed, and even in danger. Other examples include: full-frontal hugs, kisses, displaying affection in isolated areas, "full" lap-sitting, wrestling, tickling, allowing child to cling to a staff or volunteer's leg, any type of massage given by or to a child, any form of physical touch that is unwanted by the person.

Verbal Interactions should provide positive reinforcement, encouragement, praise, caring, and support. Can also include appropriate jokes or humor. Inappropriate verbal interactions include: name-calling, shaming, belittling, derogatory remarks about the child or youth or their family, harsh language that may frighten, threaten, or humiliate children or youth.

Mandated Reporters: For purposes of the Illinois Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act (the

“Act”), mandated reporters include clergy and educational personnel and childcare personnel. If a mandated reporter has reasonable cause to believe that a child known to them in their professional or official capacities may be an abused or neglected child, that individual has an obligation to immediately report to the Department of Children and Family Services. A mandated reporter will be considered to know a child in a professional or official capacity if, for instance, the reporter (i) comes into contact with the child through a regularly scheduled program, activity or service, or (ii) is affiliated with a church or other entity that is directly responsible for the care, supervision, guidance or training of a child. Note that an individual does not have to be employed by the church in order to be considered in contact with a child in a professional or official capacity.

Sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and conduct of a sexual nature include:

- Written contact, such as sexually suggestive or obscene letters, notes or invitations
- Verbal contact, such as sexually suggestive or obscene comments, threats, slurs, epithets, jokes about gender-specific traits or sexual orientation, or sexual propositions;
- Physical contact, such as intentional touching, pinching, brushing against another’s body, impeding or blocking movement, assault or coercing sexual intercourse, and
- Visual contact, such as glaring or staring at another’s body, gesturing, displaying sexually suggestive objects or pictures, cartoons, posters or magazines.

Coercive sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature occur when:

- Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly as a term or condition or circumstance of instruction, employment or participation in any church activity;
- Submission to, or rejection of, such conduct by an individual is used as a basis for evaluation in making personnel or church-related decisions affecting an individual; or
- Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual’s performance or participation in church activities or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive work or church environment.

Sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature are “unwelcome” when such conduct continues after being informed directly that such conduct is not desired by the person to whom it is directed.

It is impermissible to suggest, threaten or imply that a failure to accept a request for a date or sexual intimacy will affect a person’s job prospects, church leadership or comfortable participation in the life of the church or to hint that benefits, such as promotions, favorable performance evaluations, favorable assigned duties, recommendations or reclassifications, will be forthcoming in exchange for sexual favors.

Section: Youth Volunteers

Teenage volunteers (age 14-17) can provide valuable service to the organization through their assistance in caring for and leading children during programs and activities. All volunteer workers should be at least 14, screened, trained in their particular area of service, and should read and sign a

copy of the organization's protection policy. All teenagers should serve under the supervision of an adult and not left alone with children.

Section: Basic Guidelines for Ministry to Children and Youth

The following general procedures are part of the overall protection policy at First Congregational Church:

- This organization will operate in compliance with local, state, and federal laws and regulations.
- This organization will have insurance coverage regarding certain abuse prevention risks, as a supplement to proper plans and procedures.
- All ministry functions involving children and youth adults will maintain an attendance list for every function. Ministry leaders should record the date of the function, along with the names of all participants, staff, and volunteers.
- All children and youth will be treated with respect and fairly at all times.
- Staff and volunteers will follow the church guidelines for ministry regarding contact with children outside of church programs.
- Staff and volunteers will adhere to uniform standards of displaying affection as outlined in this policy.
- Staff and volunteers will avoid displays of affection with children that cannot be observed by others.
- Staff and volunteers will not use profanity or tell off-color jokes.
- Staff and volunteers will not discuss their sexual encounters with or around children and youth or in any way involve children and youth in their personal problems or issues.
- Staff and volunteers will not date or become romantically involved with children or youth, within our congregation nor outside the congregation.
- Alcohol and recreational drug use is prohibited on any church-sponsored program that is designed for children or youth. Staff and volunteers will not use or be under the influence of alcohol, marijuana, or illegal drugs in the presence of children and youth during activities or programs.
- Staff and volunteers will not have sexually oriented materials, including printed or online pornography, on church property. (The exception to this: approved curriculum materials for *Our Whole Lives* ministry of Human Sexuality when used in appropriate and designated workshop settings with youth whose parents have provided their written approval.)
- Staff and volunteers will not have secrets with children.
- Staff and volunteers will not stare at or comment on children or youth's bodies.
- **Two-adult rule:** It is FCCGE's standard procedure that at least two unrelated, non-cohabitating adults are be present at every function or program involving children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults. This includes indoor and outdoor activities, and vehicles. One or more of these adults must be 21 years of age or older. For large groups, the number of adult supervisors must be increased in accordance with Illinois state ratio requirements. *When this is not possible it is understood that:*
 - A system of floating supervision of classrooms is in effect.
 - Events and activities will take place in view of others.
 - **Rule of three:** at least three individuals must be present, with at least one being a screened adult employee or volunteer.
- **All workers should be at least five years older** than the children or youth for whom they are responsible.

- All leaders and volunteers in the ministry area should wear lanyards, name tags (with first and last name), or other identifiers.
- It is always the responsibility of the volunteer or leader to establish appropriate boundaries and not cross them, whether in word or deed.
- Teasing, verbal abuse, and any form of bullying will not be tolerated.
- No volunteer may be accepted to work with children or youth until that person has been an active participant in our congregation for at least six months. If less than six months, then that volunteer will be paired with an adult who has been an active participant in our congregation and who has worked/volunteered with our children and youth ministries for at least six months.

Section: Safe Facilities

The First Congregational Church facility (campus) should be safe for all who enter. Components of safety and security include:

- Windows will be placed in all doors where children or youth ministry is conducted (e.g., church school rooms, clergy and staff offices). Blinds shall remain open at all times unless there is a dangerous person in the building that would require staff, volunteers, children and youth to hide/shelter in place.
- Parents, guardians, or supervisors have the right to visit and observe the children's/youth activity, classroom or church/organization-sponsored program at any time, unannounced.
- Fully stocked first-aid kits are available throughout levels of the facility. Staff and volunteers will be informed of their locations via the Emergency Procedures online training.
- We have two AEDs located in our facility. One is on the main level in the lobby. The second is on the Pilgrim Hall Level next to the elevator.
- Areas where children or an adult with a child could easily be alone together unsupervised will be locked or restricted.
- Proper handwashing practices will be followed by all program participants and leaders. Proper cleaning, disinfecting, and sanitizing protocols will be established regarding high-touch toys and all surfaces.
- Emergency procedures should be communicated to all staff and volunteers whether via in-person or on-line training.

Section: Check-in/Check-out/Registration Process

At First Congregational Church, we will observe the following check-in/check-out procedures for children and youth as follows:

Registration for all ages:

- Each child or youth should be registered online or via a short paper "guest" registration the first time they attend ministry activities.
- An information sheet/medical release is part of the online registration and is kept on file digitally in the event of special needs or an emergency.
- An emergency contact form should indicate how and where the parents can be reached, including cell phone numbers, is part of the online registration and is kept on file digitally in the event of special needs or an emergency.
- A signed photo release is also part of the online registration and is available for review for each

registered child and/youth.

Check-in/Check-out & Attendance:

- Parents/guardians of Nursery and Preschool children will sign-in/sign-out their children each Sunday and leave their cell phone number with the caregivers/teachers.
- A form submitted by the parents or the online registration should indicate the names of adults designated to pick up their child.
- Parents must remain on the church/organization premises while their child is checked in to childcare.
- Each class will take attendance. The attendance should be completed as children enter the classroom or soon thereafter.

Section: Medications/Illness/Injury

Medications

It is the policy of First Congregational Church that prescription and non-prescription medication should be administered by parents or guardians at home. An exception to this policy may be granted to parents of children with conditions such as asthma, diabetes or severe allergic reactions or for overnight events or activities such as retreats. In these cases, parents or guardians should be given the Medication Sign-in/Sign-out form in order to provide complete details.

First Aid/CPR

First Congregational Church recommends that staff and volunteers working with children and youth obtain first aid and CPR training. AEDs are located on the main and Pilgrim Hall levels of the church. Staff and volunteers will be invited to participate in free, online First Aid training and the church will offer occasional CPR/AED training for staff and volunteers.

Illness

Children or youth who are observed to be ill or show signs of illness will be separated from other children, and the parent or guardian will be contacted to pick up the child.

Accidental Injury

If a child or youth is injured, the following steps should be followed:

- Refer to the Emergency Action Plan (EAP) posted just inside the doorway of each classroom.
- For minor injuries, a staff member or volunteer will provide a bandage, cold pack or other simple first aid as appropriate and notify the parent or guardian on pickup.
- Anyone administering first aid should take reasonable steps to avoid contact with blood, saliva and other body fluids.
- For injuries beyond simple first aid, the parent or guardian will be notified immediately, and next steps will be determined.
- For serious emergencies or accidents, staff should call 911 in addition to notifying the parent or guardian.
- After the incident, an incident report will be completed and kept on file. These forms are

available from the church office, the Director of Christian Education, or from the EAP inside each classroom.

Section: Restroom Situations

Most incidents of child-to-child abuse occur in the bathrooms. Church staff and volunteers should randomly and periodically monitor bathrooms to ensure that children are not lingering in the bathroom. This is also important so that children know that an adult could walk in at any time. If possible, staff and volunteers should use single-person bathrooms in the All Purpose Room, Church Office Suite, or Pilgrim Hall. The following supervision guidelines are recommended:

- It is inappropriate to be alone with a child of any age (other than a parent with child) in the bathroom.
- **Infant:** Diapering should be done in the nursery by a parent/legal guardian, staff person or regular volunteer. Diapering should be done out in the open, never in a secluded area or without the presence of other workers. Closed bathroom doors in the infant area are never permitted.
- **Toddler potty training:** If a toddler has an accident in underwear/clothing, ideally the parent/legal guardian should change the clothing. If the parent cannot be reached, workers or staff can change the underwear/clothing provided there is paperwork on file for this type of situation.
- **Children who are potty-trained:** These children can use the bathroom on their own unless special help is required, or the child is too young to use the restroom without assistance or supervision. After the worker has ensured that the bathroom is clear, the worker should wait outside the bathroom door, which should remain slightly open.
- Children requiring assistance should be helped outside of the bathroom stall and parents/guardians informed when they pick up the child. Workers should never be in a closed-door situation with a child or assist him or her without the child's request and another worker present.
- Staff or volunteers should stand outside the bathroom with the door ajar in order to hear what is going on inside the bathroom.
- **Children or youth with special needs:** Diapers or soiled clothes should be changed by a family member or an adult staff member with another adult as a helper. There should be paperwork on file that specifically addresses this situation so that all parties are informed.
- Trips to the bathroom should be in groups of three or more.
- Leaders should check the bathrooms are empty.
- Only one child or youth may use a bathroom stall at a time. Only send in as many children as there are stalls.

Section: Discipline

The following discipline measures should be used at First Congregational Church. When in doubt, speak to a supervisor or ministry leader for specific situations.

- Corporal punishment is not an acceptable discipline measure. A staff member or volunteer is not permitted to physically discipline a child who is misbehaving.
- If a child is behaving inappropriately, the adult should tell the child specifically what he or she is doing that is not acceptable and state the expected behavior. If this is not effective, the child

should be guided to another activity.

- If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed in an area of the room where they will work alone, away from the other children, for a brief period of time. In most cases, the number of minutes should not exceed the age of the child.
- Discuss recurring negative behavior with parents privately to help prevent further missteps.
- If the child's disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, the ministry leader should be contacted in addition to the child's parent or guardian, and the child should be removed from the classroom or activity.
- If misbehavior occurs at an off-site activity or location, the parent should be called to pick up the youth.

Section: Transportation Safety

Transporting children or youth may increase the risk of abuse or false allegations of abuse because staff and volunteers may be alone with a child or youth or unauthorized stops with children or youth may be made. There is also the risk for unsupervised children to engage in child-to-child sexual activity. The following procedures should be used when transporting children and/or youth, whether the travel is local or out of town:

- Parental permission for transportation as part of a planned event should be obtained in writing. (Digital permission is acceptable such as a text or via online Google Form registrations. Leaders should be able to access the permissions via their phone if digital forms are used.)
- Parents should be notified immediately of any schedule or venue changes.
- Children legally required to ride in a car seat or booster seat must be transported using the appropriate safety seat. All other passengers must wear a seatbelt while a vehicle is in motion or turned on.
- There should always be more than one child or youth in a car with an adult.
- There should be one adult for every six children or youth in the vehicle.
- Staff and volunteers should avoid unnecessary physical contact with children or youth in vehicles.
- Staff and volunteers should avoid engaging in sensitive conversations with children and youth in vehicles.
- Transport children directly to the destination without unauthorized stops.
- Staff or volunteer (including Confirmation Sponsors) should document who is in the vehicle. The children or youth transported TO a destination should also be the same children or youth transported BACK from a destination to ensure that no child or youth is left behind or is missing.
- Drivers must have a valid driver's license and liability insurance in order to drive any youth or child on a church-sponsored event and should be adults 21 years of age or older.
- However, it is understood drivers under the age of 21, but no younger than 18, may be used from time to time, and within state laws regarding driving privileges, especially if the event is a day trip within a reasonably short distance of the church.
- Drivers should have a clean driving record and a vehicle in good repair.

When using rental vans and private busses:

- The driver should not be assigned as a supervisor for the children or youth when using vehicles larger than a minivan, such as a 12- or 15-passenger van or bus.

- For buses, staff and volunteers should be seated throughout buses for easier supervision - ideally with at least one adult in the middle of the bus, one in the rear.
- Children or youth should be seated by grade, gender, and behaviors. If possible, high-risk children should have the full seat to themselves or be seated with an adult.
- In an emergency situation where there is just one adult and one child in the car, the adult providing the ride should inform the child's parents or leave a message with the expected departure, travel and arrival times. Children should always ride in the back seat of a personal vehicle.
- Every driver must have a valid driver's license and drive a registered and insured vehicle.
- Drivers for church/organization activities should be at least age 21 years of age.
- When traveling in groups of vehicles, the group should stay together and in communication.

When using public transportation:

- Children or youth should remain together in one area of the bus, shuttle, train, if possible.
- Staff and volunteers assigned to a group of children or youth should remain with that group on the public transportation.
- A head count/roll call should be done immediately upon entering and leaving the public transportation.

Section: Off-Site Activities

Field trips present unique risks for the safety of children and youth. Large groups are difficult to monitor, children may be more likely to act out in a less structured environment, and our church cannot screen all other adults who will have access to our youth. It is important that everyone is aware of these risks and takes measures to minimize them. The following are general procedures when children and youth are participating in off-site activities:

- Children and youth should have parent/guardian permission in advance to participate in any activity that takes place away from church/organization grounds. Permission should be given in writing and signed/dated by a parent or guardian. The permission slip will identify the name and date of the activity in which the child or youth will be participating, as well as provide a description of the activity.
- Permission forms may be completed digitally but leaders must be able to access the information while off-site from their smart phone or laptop or tablet.
- The leader(s) of the activity should have an emergency contact phone number for each child or youth participating in the event.
- In general, it is not appropriate for children and youth to meet at a volunteer's house or supervisor's private residence unless some parents and/or approved adults are also in attendance.

Off-site Contact Outside of Regularly Scheduled Activities

Many cases of organizational abuse occur off-site and outside of regularly scheduled activities. This type of contact outside of regularly scheduled activities may put church employees, volunteers, and our church at increased risk. Our church strongly recommends that staff and volunteers do not have outside contact with unrelated children and youth from the church except in connection with other appropriate programs and activities which have similar guidelines to those contained in this policy. However, if off-site contact is unavoidable, our church has determined that the following forms of

outside contact are appropriate and inappropriate:

- **Appropriate:**

- Taking groups of children on an outing.
- Attending sporting or arts activities with groups of children.
- Attending functions at a child's home with parents present.

- **Inappropriate:**

- Taking one child on an outing without parents' written permission.
- Visiting one child in the child's home without a parent present.
- Entertaining one child in the home of a church staff member or volunteer.
- A lone child spending the night with a church staff member or volunteer.

Specific Recommendations for Parks, Arcades, Amusement Parks, etc.:

If the trip is to a location where youth will be interacting in a large space and it is not possible to assign specific staff or volunteers to a group of youth, then:

- Set boundaries at the location. Tell the youth where they may and may not go. If it is an indoor or gated setting such as an Arcade:
 - Post an adult at the entrance/exit.
 - Remaining staff and volunteers should be assigned to monitor specific areas such as outside the bathrooms and the perimeter.
- Youth should check-in every hour whether in person at a designated meeting point or via a video call.

Section: Overnight Activities/Camping

Overnight stays present unique risks to children, staff, and volunteers. They often involve changing clothes, groups of all genders and different ages in a more intimate atmosphere than usual, more unstructured activities, and increased supervision demands for staff and volunteers. During overnight and camping situations, the following procedures apply:

- Overnight stays at private homes are prohibited unless approved by the Church administration.
- All overnight activities must be documented and approved in writing by program staff or clergy.
- Program Staff may appoint another staff or volunteer "Lead" to supervise the overnight.
- Staff or volunteer Leads are expected to regularly and randomly observe overnight activities on periodic basis.
- All adults supervising young people should be screened, trained and approved for service.
- Permission form, medical release form and emergency contact information are required for each child or youth. Digital forms such as online registrations via a Google form are also acceptable.
- The forms will be retained by the person responsible for the activity for the duration of the event. The person responsible for the activity should have access to digital forms via their smart phone or print copies of the digital form.
- Parents should be given a summary of the event details, schedule of events and timeframes.

- Appropriate Leader to participant ratios will be established before the event and staff and volunteers scheduled accordingly:
 - Ages 8 to 12 years: 1 adult to 8 children
 - Ages 12 to 17 years: 1 adult to 10 youth
- With regards to sleeping arrangements, separate youth based on the gender they identify as into separate rooms and post staff or volunteers at the entrance/exit. If this is not feasible, separate genders by as much space as possible with staff or volunteers in between.
- Hotels should have interior door access only, i.e., avoid motels where rooms are open to an outdoor walkway.
- For hotels, assign youth to rooms based on the gender they identify as and their age. Adults should have their own rooms. If adults must share rooms with youth, staff and volunteers must have their own beds and never change in front of the youth.
- In a cabin type setting, staff and volunteers should be placed in bunks in such a way as to maximize their supervision of the cabin sleep space and in a way that decreases the chances of youth sneaking out (ex. Adult Lead sleeping by the door.)
- Establish a curfew and conduct bed checks with adults visiting rooms in pairs. If possible, the adults should be of the same gender as the rooms being checked. Never enter the room alone where young people are assigned to sleep on overnight trips. If you must enter, make sure there is at least another adult present.
- Children and youth should be supervised at all times. If small groups within the larger group will be separated, it is important to have ways to communicate, such as via cell phones or walkie-talkies.
- At least one staff or volunteer must stay awake while youth are awake and out of their beds.
- Staff or volunteers should be on duty in the halls or cabins at night until an hour after lights out and all rooms are quiet.
- During trips, sometimes a youth or adviser needs to break off from the main group. If only one adult can break off the main group, he or she should take several young people, even if there is just one who has the need to leave the main group.
- If open showers are the only facilities available, separate shower times for youth and adults should be designated. Youth and adults should not shower together. There should be shower monitors. Swimsuits may be required for showers in some instances.
- Children and youth of different genders should not change, bathe or sleep in the same room together. One exception to this might would be in a situation where all children or youth are sleeping in the same large area with supervising adults, such as an overnight event in a gymnasium or other large open space. However; children and youth should still use individual bathrooms or stalls or changing areas for changing and bathing/showering.
- On a service trip, whether domestic or international, a youth should not be alone with an adult from the host mission, including leaders, homeowners, etc.

Overnights at the church or offsite:

- Physical boundaries within the church must be clearly defined and explained to the youth.
- Assign each "Lead" a specific group of youth to supervise. Each Lead should then maintain a roll sheet listing the youth in their group. Head counts and roll checks should be conducted routinely throughout the evening.
- Periodic facility "walk-throughs" should be conducted throughout the event with special attention to high-risk areas such as bathrooms, entrances/exits, stairwells, unused rooms that are not able to be locked.

Section: Technology/Social Media

The basic premise of these guidelines is to extend our safe church practices into the digital world, especially where pastoral relationships and children and youth are concerned. Regarding technology and social media, the following apply:

Equipment and Internet Connectivity:

- The use of public and church computers, laptops, tablets, or related devices are to be for lawful purposes only. The user shall not engage in any manner that violates or infringes the rights of others or that is unlawful or violates any of the behaviors within this policy. Use of church-owned property shall be supervised by staff or volunteer leaders.
- Church Wifi is to be used for lawful purposes only. The user shall not engage in any manner that violates or infringes the rights of others or violates any of the behaviors of this policy.
- Church accounts such as Google suite are to be used for lawful purposes only.

General Communications Guidelines:

- No sexual content.
- No profanity.
- No venting about personal issues or specific people.
- No anonymous online presence.
- All staff and volunteers using technology and social media should read and sign a copy of our Behavioral Covenant for use of Digital Media.
- Staff and volunteers should not engage in one-on-one electronic communications with children and youth without parental permission. Parents or other adults will be copied on emails and kept apprised of ongoing texting or group youth phone conversations. Communication should be traceable and savable.
- Photos of children or youth should not be shared on social media platforms without permission from a parent/guardian. Contact program staff to check for permission.
- Staff and volunteers should not "friend" or "follow" children and youth on their personal social media pages.
- Staff and volunteers should conduct themselves in an appropriate manner on teleconference calls, such as Zoom, or other digital communications and comply with all boundary awareness guidelines.
- Realize that emails, texts, and social media may not be an appropriate means of communication for matters that are pastorally or legally sensitive.
- Clergy and staff should use discretion when submitting "friend" requests to or accepting "friend" requests from parishioners.
- Before participating in online relationships with parishioners, clergy and church staff should consider whether and how the relationships are likely to be maintained after either of the parties has left the church.
- Parishioners requesting to "friend" a clergy or staff member OR a youth requesting to "friend" an adult can be invited to join a closed Facebook group rather than be accepted as a friend on a personal profile account.

Inappropriate materials:

- Any material on any site (whether affiliated with the church or not) that raises suspicion that a child has been or will be abused/neglected/exploited should be immediately reported to clergy and the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). If the material is church-affiliated, that material should be documented for church records and then removed from the site after consultation with DCFS and the police.
- Inappropriate material (but DOES NOT raise suspicion that a child has been or will be abused/neglected/exploited) on a church affiliated site should be immediately removed.
- Any content that details inappropriate behavior (outside the bounds of the established behavioral covenant) during a church sponsored event or activity will be addressed by church staff and adult volunteers and parents or guardians.

Adult to Youth Communications:

- Adults should use prudent judgment in the time of day that they contact students through social media, texting, phone calls.
- Parents/guardians should be included on emails and texts sent to youth or made aware of these communications and given approval.
- Adults will only directly contact high school freshman and older.
- Staff should carefully consider using text, phone calls, emails, and social media only for logistic, pastoral care, or emergency communications.
- The "home phone rule" is a basic rule of thumb to use - normally, do not text, chat, call, or email back-and-forth with students at a time one would not normally call their home phone line, i.e. before 8:00 AM or after 9:00 PM. Adults will not text or call youth during school hours. Typically this will be between 2:30 and 9:00 PM.
- Adults should not get into an isolated one-on-one relationship with youth through social media, text, email, or phone calls.
- Anonymous messaging apps, such as Snapchat, that do not provide a savable "history" should not be used by clergy, staff, or volunteers.
- Clergy, staff, and other volunteers who work with children and youth are strongly encouraged to set stringent privacy settings on any social networking profile.
- Adults should not submit "friend" requests to children or youth but may accept friend requests with discretion.

Social Media: For many organizations, social networking sites have become the preferred method of communication. In order to protect youth from abuse and staff and volunteers from false allegations, please follow these guidelines for organizations that allow electronic communication through social networking sites.

- It is recommended that program administrators create a public social network page for the program. Then clergy, staff, and youth are instructed to communicate through this public page instead of through individual profiles. This approach allows the administrators to monitor communication and ensures that staff and volunteers do not have private (and possibly inappropriate) conversations with youth.
- Encourage clergy, staff, and volunteers to have "private" profiles on their personal accounts so that youth do not have access to the private information of clergy, staff, and volunteers.
- Individual personal profiles of clergy are to be used to interact with personal friends, family, and peers. Clergy should not submit "friend" requests to parishioners and others to whom they minister. The disparity of power may make the other person feel uncomfortable about declining such a request.

- Postings of images of church members, friends of the church and guests under the age of 18 will be made without identifying information. When registering their child or youth each program year, parents/guardians have the opportunity to give or deny permission for images to be posted of their child or youth. Postings will be strictly for the communications of the church.
- Respect the dignity of every person depicted in any image. (Ex. when posting images from the beach or other water-based activities when person are wearing bathing suits.)
- Any member of the group can tag ONLY themselves in photos.
- For a youth social network group, e.g. Facebook group, parents should be invited to be members as well.
- Groups should have at least two unrelated adult administrators.
- Invitations to youth to join the church group should be made by staff or adult volunteer administrators.
- If the church community chooses to utilize any social networking site(s) to communicate with students associated with our community of faith, clergy and church staff should ensure that other staff or designated adult volunteers have full access to all of the profiles and correspondence.
 - Parents/guardians should be informed about how the church utilizes social network platforms.
 - When possible, communication should be sent to the entire group or posted in public areas (e.g. on the "wall"), not in private messages. This includes images.
 - When clergy or staff have ongoing private, pastoral communications (e.g. emails, Facebook messages, texting, etc.), the recipient and frequency of communication should be disclosed to the parents or guardians of the and to the staff member's supervisor or the clergy member's associate.
 - Someone on staff has to have access to the Username and Password so that it is understood that communications may be reviewed at any time or may be investigated.
 - Consistency among all youth on all platforms is of the utmost importance.

Section: Online Events or Video Communications

Even in a virtual setting such as a Zoom call or other online event, leaders are expected to provide a safe environment, adhering to the highest standards of behavior as outlined in this policy. The following guidelines apply:

- Two-deep leadership with screened and trained leaders is required even in virtual interactions with children and/or youth.
- Leaders should be dressed appropriately and set guidelines for children and youth to also dress appropriately while attending virtual meetings.
- Leaders should be cognizant of their surroundings when conducting online meetings to make sure there are no inappropriate backgrounds or items in the room from which they are streaming. Some examples of inappropriate items might be alcohol, smoking materials, or adult-themed materials.
- Parents should be notified if inappropriate activity has occurred or if there are other concerns about online interactions.
- Staff will review and compare competing digital platforms to determine which ones provide sufficient security to both oversee who is entering and exiting online sessions as well as reduce

the opportunity for potential abuse, harassment, and bullying. Software controls and settings will be reviewed with security in mind.

- Leaders should take care in their messaging, whether it is via group text or an online meeting.
- Leaders should not use electronic communication to post or discuss sensitive topics, including those of a sexual nature.
- Leaders should watch out for behaviors or statements from other staff and volunteers that violate church policies or suggest abusive conduct.
- Parents should be included on online correspondence and invitations to remote activities for children and youth.
- If a leader receives inappropriate communication from a young person, they should notify their supervisor immediately and save the correspondence.
- Leaders should not take photos or post images or video of the online sessions without parental permission.
- In mentoring situations, where the conversations may typically be one-on-one in an open area, the adult must find ways to encourage transparency in the virtual environment.
- Other leaders in the organization should be encouraged to attend or drop in on virtual sessions taking place with children and youth.

Section: Publishing/Posting Content Online

- Congregations must inform participants when they are being recorded because church buildings are not considered public spaces.
- Any faith community that distributes video of its worship services or activities on the web or via other broadcast media MUST post signs that indicate the service is being broadcast.
- All communities of faith should take care to secure signed Media Releases from adults and guardians of minor children who will or may participate in activities that may be photographed or video recorded for distribution. Parents and caregivers complete this permission as a part of the annual online registration.
- Photos that are published on church sponsored sites should not include identifying information such as the name or contact information for children or youth.

Section: Mandatory Reporting

In the state of Illinois, anyone who is charged with the care of children, youth and/or vulnerable adults is a mandatory reporter. You are required to participate in the free, online training provided at <https://mr.dcfstraining.org/> within three months of being hired as a staff member or volunteer and thereafter every three years as long as working with children and youth. As a mandated reporter, you are required to call the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services Child Abuse Hotline at 888-241-8258. In addition, the incident should be reported to the designated church staff you report to (Director of Christian Education, Director of Youth Ministries, Director of Music Ministries) or clergy.

Misconduct by a clergy or staff member should be reported to the current Church Council Moderator.

Section: Reporting and Incident Investigation

If a person witnesses abuse, signs of neglect, or concerning behavior, they should document what they have seen and to whom they have reported it.

If a child, youth or vulnerable adult is in immediate danger, call 911.

As a reporter of abuse, it is not the reporter's job to determine whether the disclosure is credible or prove that abuse occurred.

All persons involved in reporting or documenting any alleged incident of abuse should hold information in confidence, subject only to such disclosures as required under church/organization procedures and as necessary to facilitate investigation of allegations of abuse and resolution of the situation.

The immediate response to alleged abuse at First Congregational Church will include removing the person from their position temporarily or indefinitely, reporting to the appropriate governmental agency and/or police, requiring the alleged abuser to not have contact with children or youth when at the facility, and/or requiring the person to have an escort when attending the church/organization. The organization will be in contact with its lawyer, insurance company and other related parties. Pastoral counseling will be offered to all parties involved. All of these responses/consequences will depend on the nature of the behavior.

A designated spokesperson will inform the congregation about the situation and communicate action items when appropriate.

Section: Law Enforcement/Media Relations

If an abuse incident or allegation occurs at First Congregational Church, law enforcement may be in contact the church/organization. All leaders, employees and volunteers will cooperate fully with law enforcement or governmental agencies investigating allegations of injury or abuse.

The Senior Minister will be the designated spokesperson to handle all inquiries from news media. This spokesperson will work with the church/organization's attorney and others to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of those involved.

Section: Reporting and Complaint Response Procedures

Because our church is dedicated to maintaining zero tolerance for abuse, it is imperative that every staff member and volunteer at our church participate actively in the protection children, youth, adults, members, guests, volunteers and staff. In the event that staff and/or volunteers observe any suspicious or inappropriate behaviors on the part of other staff or volunteers, it is their personal responsibility to immediately report their observations. At our church, policies apply to everyone.

All reports of suspicious or inappropriate behavior with children or youth will be taken seriously. Our church's procedures will be followed to ensure the rights of all those involved are protected.

Examples of Suspicious or Inappropriate Behaviors between adults and children:

- Violation of the abuse prevention policies described above
- Seeking private time or one-on-one time with children or youth
- Buying gifts or individual children or youth
- Making suggestive comments to children
- Picking favorites

Staff/Volunteer Response to Suspicious or Inappropriate Behavior

In the event that a staff member/volunteer witnesses suspicious or inappropriate behaviors or policy violations by another staff member/volunteer, they are instructed to do the following;

- Interrupt the behavior.
- Report the behavior to the program staff director of that ministry or clergy - this may be done anonymously.
- If the report is about the program staff director or clergy, contact the next level of supervision: clergy or a Church Council Moderator.
- Document the report but do not conduct an investigation.
- Keep reporting until the appropriate action is taken.
- **If at any point in gathering information about a report of suspicious or inappropriate behavior, a concern arises about possible abuse, neglect, or exploitation, contact the DCFS at 1-800-252-2873.**

Staff Response to a Report of suspicious or inappropriate behaviors or policy violations from a staff member/volunteer

- Report to the next level of administration and determine the appropriate administrator to respond to the concern.
- Consult with church counselor.
- Determine the appropriate response based on the report.
- Speak with the staff member/volunteer who has been reported.
- Review the file of the reported staff member/volunteer to determine if similar complaints have been reported in the past.
- Document the report on the appropriate form.
- **If at any point in gathering information about a report of suspicious or inappropriate behavior, a concern arises about possible abuse, neglect, or exploitation, contact the DCFS at 1-800-252-2873.**
- If appropriate, notify parents or guardians.
- Advise the staff member/volunteer who reported the behavior that the report is being taken seriously.
- Based on the information gathered, the following may be required:
 - Increase monitoring or supervision of the staff member, volunteer, program.
 - If policy violations with children are confirmed, the staff member or volunteer must be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination and prosecution.

- If more information is needed, interview and/or survey other staff and volunteers or children (with parents present).

Church response to a Report of suspicious or inappropriate behaviors or policy violations from a staff member/volunteer

After the internal review of the suspicious or inappropriate behaviors, or policy violations, determine if system changes are necessary, such as:

- The need for increased supervision.
- The need for revised policies or procedures.
- The need for additional training.

Reports of suspected or known abuse may be made confidentially to the following: the Senior Minister, Associate Minister, Director of Christian Education, Director of Youth Ministries, Director of Music Ministries. Contact information may be found at www.fccge.org.

Additional Guidelines for Staff/Volunteer Response to Incidents or Allegations of Abuse:

- If you witness abuse, interrupt the behavior immediately.
- If abuse is disclosed to you, assure the individual disclosing that they are correct to tell you.
- Protect the alleged victim from intimidation, retribution, or further abuse.
- Be sure to document the incident, disclosure, or circumstances causing your suspicion of abuse.
- **You are a Mandated Reporter, contact the DCFS at 1-800-252-2873.**
- **It is not your job to investigate the incident but it is your job to report the incident to DCFS and to your supervisor in a timely manner.**

Additional Guidelines for Church Leadership Responding to Incidents or Allegations of Abuse:

- Determine the immediate needs of the victim.
- Notify parents if appropriate.
- Ensure that the incident has been reported to the proper state authorities.
- If the accused is a staff member or volunteer, suspend them and remove access to children.
- Review the file of the accused.
- Document information surrounding the incident.
- If abuse is confirmed, terminate the staff member or volunteer.
- Prepare a media response with collaboration with Clergy, appropriate program staff, Director of Communications and Moderators.

Reporting Child-to-Child Sexual Abuse and Sexual Behaviors

The thought that one child may sexually abuse another child does not occur to many people. Unfortunately, abuse between peers occurs. Child-to-Child sexual activity and sexualized behaviors often remain unreported in organizations because staff and volunteers are not comfortable documenting these situations, or may not know how.

- **Child-to-Child Interactions** - Most serious incidents of child-to-child abuse are preceded by more subtle incidents such as name-calling, taunting, or roughhousing. Interrupting these interactions early and establishing and communicating standard of conduct can keep the

church environment safe. Our church recognizes that the following interactions are high risk and should be prohibited:

- Hazing
- Bullying
- Derogatory name-calling
- Games of Truth-or-Dare
- Singling out one child for different treatment
- Ridicule or humiliation
- In order to adequately respond to and track incidents within the church, all sexual activity between children and sexualized behaviors of children must be consistently documented.

Staff and Volunteer Response

In the event that a staff member or volunteer sees a child exhibit sexualized behaviors or suspects child-to-child sexual activity, the employee or volunteer is instructed to do the following:

- Interrupt the behavior and separate the children.
- Do not investigate.
- Report the behavior to a supervisor or program staff director.
- Document your report with factual information only. Opinions should not be included on the incident report.

Staff Response

In the event that a program staff director, clergy, or other church leadership receives a report of a child's sexualized behavior or child-to-child sexual activity, they should do the following:

- Determine the appropriate administrator to conduct an internal review of the incident.
- Notify the parents or guardians of the children involved.
- Notify the authorities if required by state reporting mandates.
- Document the incident and the church's response.
- Develop a written corrective action or follow-up plan in response to the incident.

Church Response

After the internal review of the sexualized behavior or child-to-child sexual activity, the church will determine what can be done to support the parties involved and what can be done to prevent a recurrence, such as:

- The need for additional supervision.
- The need for revised policies or procedures.
- The need for additional training.

Thank you for reviewing our Safe Sanctuary Policy. You will be guided to complete the necessary confirmation of receipt and review documentation, the Volunteer Disclosure documentation, Digital and Social Media Covenant and Emergency Procedures online training.

This updated policy was approved by the FCCGE Church Council January 2025.