

Proposed Safety Policy for the First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church in Milton

WHEREAS the 1995 General Assembly of Unitarian Universalist Churches called on our Association to promote safer congregations for people of all ages and genders; and

BECAUSE Unitarian Universalists affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person; justice, equity and compassion in human relations; and acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;

BECAUSE we desire Unitarian Universalist congregations to be places safe from interpersonal violence or abuse;

BECAUSE Unitarian Universalists, along with many other religious movements, have experienced incidents in which clergy or lay persons have acted in ways to jeopardize interpersonal safety within our congregations, causing harm and breach of trust; and

BECAUSE we recognize that both laity and clergy need to accept active responsibility for the prevention of interpersonal violence and abuse within our congregations and for healing where such violence or abuse has occurred, or may occur, so that there is a restoration of community; and

BECAUSE we believe the Congregation should be adequately prepared in case of an emergency (fire, active shooter, bomb scare, etc.)

WHEREAS we recognize the moral complexity involved with the issues of justice, fair relationship, power and trust, and physical safety;

THEREFORE WE RESOLVE to adopt this policy with its required procedures and recommended guidelines to foster and support a safer congregation.

Statement of Intent

We, the congregation of The First Parish in Milton, Unitarian Universalist, wish to promote the physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being of our religious community, including the members, friends, staff, children, and visitors. We want our church to be a respectful, caring, and safe environment following our Unitarian Universalist principles, free of violence and abuse of any kind including intimidation, coercion, sexual harassment and physical and sexual abuse. We strive to be an inclusive community, affirming our differences in beliefs, opinions, and life experiences. However, concern for the safety and well-being of the congregation as a whole must be given priority over the privileges and inclusion of the individual. To the degree that disruption compromises the health of this congregation, our actions as a people of faith must reflect this emphasis on security – personal, physical, and emotional.

Scope & Implementation

- This Policy is applicable to any activities that are organized or sponsored by the church. This

Policy includes both Procedures and Guidelines:

- The **Procedures** in this Policy are mandatory for all those who currently work or desire to work (clergy or lay, paid or volunteer) with children, youth at the church.
- The **Guidelines** in this Policy are highly encouraged for all those who currently work or desire to work (paid or volunteer) with children, youth, and vulnerable adults at the church, and other groups who serve those populations and who use the church facilities.
- Other groups who serve children and/or youth and use the church facilities shall certify in writing that they have been given a copy of this Policy, have reviewed it and either shall have similar procedures in place which govern their activities or be willing to abide by the church procedures.
- Clergy and applicable staff and the Parish Committee will be responsible for the oversight, implementation, and maintenance of this Policy.
- This Policy may be amended at any time with the approval of the Committee.

Definitions

For the purpose of this Policy, the following definitions apply:

- Child shall mean any person 13 years of age or younger.
- Youth shall mean any person between 13-17 years of age.
- Vulnerable adults are those protected by Massachusetts state law who are “18 or older and who are wholly or partially dependent on others to meet their daily living needs” This also includes those over 60, as they are protected by elder abuse laws.¹
- Volunteers shall mean those persons who work with Children and Youth at the church and are not paid or otherwise compensated for their efforts.
- Staff shall mean those persons who work with children and youth and are paid for their efforts. Clergy are included in this category.
- Church-sponsored activity shall mean any activity initiated and coordinated by the church.
- Accidents shall mean an unintentional act that occurs in which an individual is hurt.
- Incidents shall mean an action that is observed that does not require mandated reporting, but does require attention by staff or clergy.
- Suspected Abuse shall mean anything a Volunteer or staff person sees or has been told of that leads the person to suspect a Child, Youth, or Vulnerable Adult has been abused in some way.
- For purposes of this policy, “abuse” is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child’s or vulnerable adult’s physical, psychological or emotional health and development as defined by state law. This can include abuse that may be physical, emotional, sexual, neglect/abandonment, trafficking or financial exploitation.

Policy Regarding Disruptive Behavior & Abuse

While openness to a wide variety of individual expressions is one of the prime values held by our congregation and expressed in our denomination’s shared values, and historical sources and principles, we affirm the belief that our congregation must maintain a secure atmosphere where such openness can exist. When any person’s physical and/or emotional well-being or freedom to safely express his or her beliefs is threatened, the source of this threat must be addressed firmly and promptly, even if this ultimately requires the expulsion of the offending person or persons. There may

¹ (<https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleII/Chapter19c/Section1>)

be times when the disruptive behavior of an individual within the church building will lead members to voice their concerns about one of more of the following:

- Perceived threats to the safety of any adult or child;
- The persistent and/or unrelenting disruption of church activities;
- Misrepresentation of church values and principles in interaction, diminishing the character of the church for its potential and existing membership.

Procedures for Responding to Disruptive Behavior

The following shall be the procedure of The First Parish in Milton, Unitarian Universalist, in dealing with these issues:

Please note: in cases where the Minister's behavior is the concern, reports should be made to the Chair of the COM and all responses and procedures will be handled by the COM rather than the Minister."

If an immediate response to a behavior is required, this will be undertaken by the Minister, if available, and/or the leader of the group involved.

- This may include asking the offending person or persons to leave, or suspending the meeting or activity until such a time as it can safely be resumed.
- If further assistance is required, the Police Department may be called.
- Anytime any of these actions are undertaken without the Minister being present, the Minister must be notified.
- A letter will be sent immediately to the person complained of, detailing the offensive behavior and asking for an explanation.
- A follow-up letter detailing what steps must be taken before returning to the activities involved will be sent by the Minister, if necessary, to the offending party or parties.
- The Minister will be in confidential consultation with the Committee on Ministry and Parish Committee Executive Team.

In situations not requiring immediate response, the individual whose behavior is causing concern will be informed of the complaint as soon as possible by the Minister. If necessary, the complaint will be referred to the Committee on Ministry. The Committee and the Minister will have available to them the guidelines below. However, they will respond to the problems in terms of their own judgment. The committee will respond to problems as they arise. There will be no attempt to define "acceptable" behavior" in advance and persons identified as acting disruptively will be engaged respectfully and in non-stereotyping ways. The Committee will collect all necessary information from the complaining parties and those who observed the incident.

Guidelines for Responding to Disruptive & Dangerous Behavior

In all cases:

- Ministers, relevant staff, and/or the COM may consult or hire professional subject matter experts (such as licensed attorneys, licensed mental health professionals) or engage for any issues surrounding any allegations, accidents, or incidents that may involve possible legal action. Additionally, they may report to civil authorities any actions or behaviors that they have

reasonable cause to believe constitutes imminent danger for anyone or a threat to public safety.

- When choosing how to respond to concerning situations, it is important to consider how our actions align with and intersect with our values and there are resources available to support that process.²
- To aid in evaluating the problem and determining the necessary response, the following points should be considered:
 - DANGEROUSNESS – Is the individual the source of a reasonably perceived threat or threat to persons or property?
 - DISRUPTIVENESS – How much interference with church functions is going on?
 - OFFENSIVENESS – How likely is it that prospective or existing members will be driven away?
 - CAUSES – Why is the disruption occurring? Is it a conflict between the individual and others in the church? Is it due to a professionally diagnosed condition of mental or physical illness?
 - HISTORY – What was the frequency and degree of disruption caused in the past?
 - PROBABILITY OF CHANGE – How likely is it that the problem behavior will diminish in the future?
- The Committee and/or Minister will decide upon the necessary response on a case by case basis. However, the following three levels of response are recommended:
 1. LEVEL ONE – A member of the Committee on Ministry and the Minister shall meet with the offending individual to communicate the concern and give the individual involved a chance to explain the situation.
 2. LEVEL TWO – If the behavior is still a problem for other church members, the offending individual may be excluded from the church and/or specific church activities for a limited period of time, with reasons and the conditions of return made clear in writing by the Minister in consultation with the COM and Parish Committee. Any action taken up to this point may be appealed to the Parish Committee and/or Minister.
 3. LEVEL THREE – The offending individual may be permanently excluded from the church premises and all church activities. Before this is carried out, the COM will consult with the Parish Committee and the Minister. If it is decided that the expulsion will take place, a letter will be sent by the Minister explaining the expulsion and the individual's rights and possible recourse.

Procedure for Responding to Allegations of Abuse

Staff and volunteers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect. In the event that an individual at FPM becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect, this should be reported immediately to the relevant staff member and to the Minister for further action, including reporting to authorities as may be mandated by state law. In the event that abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at FPM or during our sponsored programs or activities, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. The parent or guardian of the alleged to be the victim will be notified.

² <https://www.uua.org/safe/handbook/alternatives-calling-police>

2. The worker or church member alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave pending an investigation and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation. They should be instructed to have no contact with the victim or with witnesses.
3. All allegations of abuse should be reported to the civil authorities by the appropriate staff person and/or Minister, and the organization will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists. The organization will fully cooperate with the investigation of the allegation by civil authorities.
4. The insurance company will be notified, and the organization will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.
5. The organization will designate a spokesperson to the media concerning allegations of abuse or neglect. The advice of legal counsel will be sought before responding to media inquiries or releasing information about the situation to the congregation. All other representatives of the organization should refrain from speaking to the media.
6. A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it. This should be for the purpose of providing pastoral support during the time of crisis and not for the purpose of investigating the allegations or influencing the investigation.
7. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with children or youth.

Policy Regarding Child & Youth Abuse Prevention

We strive to ensure a caring religious community free from all forms of violence and abuse, including intimidation, coercion, sexual harassment, and physical or sexual abuse. Adults and older youth in leadership roles hold positions of stewardship and play a vital role in fostering the spiritual development of children within the community. It is therefore essential that leaders be well qualified to provide the nurture, care, and support that help children and youth develop a positive sense of self, independence, and responsibility.

Healthy relationships between young people and their leaders must be grounded in mutual respect. Among the most important areas of growth for children and youth are self-worth and the development of a healthy sexual identity. Children, youth, and adults suffer harm when leaders become sexually involved with young people in their care. Therefore, ministers, staff, and volunteers and any other person working in a paid or volunteer capacity under the auspices of the church shall absolutely refrain from any sexual, seductive, or erotic behavior with children or youth, and shall not engage in behavior with children, youth, or adults that constitutes sexual harassment or verbal, emotional, or physical abuse.

Required Screening/Training to Work or Volunteer with Children/Youth

All persons who desire to work or volunteer on a **regular basis** with the children participating in our programs and activities will be screened and trained. This includes:

Application - The application (interview and/or written) will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, previous FPM affiliation, reference and employment information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application or interview notes will be maintained in confidence on file at the FPM.

References - Before an applicant is permitted to work with children, at least two of the applicants' references will be checked. When possible, these references should be of an institutional nature, rather than personal or family references, preferably from organizations where the applicant has worked with children in the past. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file at FPM.

Criminal Background Check – A national criminal background check is required for employees and volunteers serving child and youth every 3 years.

- Before a background check is run, prospective workers will be asked to sign an authorization form allowing FPM to run the check.
- If an individual declines to sign the authorization form, they will be unable to work with children and youth.
- A disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the COM in consultation with the Minister and relevant staff on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances.
- Anyone who has pled guilty to or been convicted of crimes of child sexual abuse or physical abuse, or crimes of physical or sexual violence is ineligible to serve or to work with children or youth in any church-sponsored activity. Pled guilty, or convictions for an offense involving children and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, or exploitation, or any conduct contrary to our mission can preclude someone from being permitted to work with children.
- Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form can also be a disqualifying event.
- The background check authorization form and results will be maintained in confidence on file at FPM.

Training- Training on this policy will be required for all new childcare workers and volunteers and FPM may require retraining on this policy as needed due to updates or edits. FPM will strive to provide opportunities for additional training classes or events on an annual basis.

Required Procedures for Working & Volunteering with Children/Youth

- **6 MONTH RULE:** All adult individuals serving with children, youth, and must be active participants in the church (i.e., attend worship or other church-related activities regularly) for at least 6 months prior to volunteering. This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant for working with children.
- **2 ADULT RULE:** It is a goal to have 2 unrelated adults to be present for all children and youth church programs or church-sponsored activities, whether on church grounds or away and for minors to not be alone with one adult on our premises or in any sponsored activity. In instances when this is not possible:
 - 2 unrelated +16 year old employees may serve as Nursery Workers and RE Assistants. They must be screened, trained, supervised, and 5 years older than the children served.
 - The activity should be moved to a public area or gathering space where other people are present.
 - There should be no fewer than three students with the adult teacher.
 - Any one-on-one interaction (such as counseling) should happen with the knowledge of a staff person and the minor's guardian. Doors should be ajar and the session should be documented.
- **OPEN DOOR RULE:** Ideally children and youth classrooms should have doors installed with a clear windowpane or a half door, providing clear visibility into the rooms. Doors with no

windows or half doors should remain open.

- **BATHROOMS:** When a young child has to use the bathroom during class time, the teacher or teacher's assistant may accompany the child to the bathroom. If assistance is needed, bathroom doors shall be left open and a guardian should be notified of the assistance. For individuals with ongoing toileting assistance needs beyond potty-training, an approved plan about bathroom use should be made & signed by parents/guardians. This plan should be kept on file and reviewed as needed. All diapering should be handled by a parent or guardian unless permission is provided in writing. Older children may use the bathroom alone or with friends at the volunteers discretion.
- **INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR:** If a volunteer or staff person is uneasy about any interaction or communication with children, youth, or vulnerable adult, the volunteer may report it to the appropriate staff person. If appropriate, they or the staff person may also choose to report it to the legal guardian. Any inappropriate conduct between a volunteer and a youth, child, or vulnerable adult should be addressed promptly. The volunteer may be removed if further infractions occur or if a single infraction warrants removal.
- **SIGN IN & OUT:** Sign-in and Sign-Out sheets should be used by staff & volunteers in the nursery.
- **OVERNIGHT AND OFFSITE TRIPS:** The following are the recommended volunteer-to-student ratios.
 - Children: (2 adults to 8 children)
 - Middle School: (2 adults to 12 youth)
 - High School: (2 adults to 16 youth)
 - Youth should only go in their assigned bedrooms on overnight trips, and not into the assigned rooms of other youth. If going into another room is necessary, the door must remain open.
 - Adult volunteers cannot share beds with children/youth.
 - One volunteer should be in charge of counting all students before and after a group changes location.
 - Where possible, hotels opening to an interior hallway should be utilized for overnight events. Where possible, at hotels where multiple floors are being utilized, at least two adults should be on every floor where youth or children are staying.
 - For any off-site event, the trip's leader must obtain medical information and liability release forms for all participants and provide guardians with a schedule and contact information.
 - When using charter buses, certification should be provided by the carrier that drivers have completed a recent background check. Additionally, at no time should contracted drivers be alone with youth or children.
 - If the transportation plans of picking up a youth or child change while attending a church event, staff or the volunteer in charge must receive a text, phone call, or email from the youth's or child's guardian stating they have approved this change.
 - When possible, older classes should institute a 3 buddy system for hikes, tours, or field trips where time apart from adult supervision is expected.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED GUIDELINES:

- **REGISTRATIONS, PERMISSIONS, RULES & WAIVER:** Guardians should register children and youth to attend programming and this form should include information about medical needs, emergency contact info, as well as a permission, overview of expectations/rules and waiver/liability release form.
- **5-YEAR RULE:** Youth and young adult volunteers should be at least 5 years older than the populations they serve in Children's and Youth Ministries.

- **PHOTO/VIDEO/TECHNOLOGY:** The following guidelines are recommended for volunteers, staff, and clergy to practice when using technology:
 - Church events are considered public events and, therefore, are not subject to social media and photo/video permission policies. However, for youth and children’s activities, parents will be invited to register their child to opt-out of having their child’s image used in church publications or publicity.
 - When posting photos, refrain from using full names and other identifiable information unless written permission is provided. It is recommended that staff and volunteers get permission from legal guardians to communicate with or post/share about children, youth and vulnerable adults.
 - It is recommended that when sending email, use the “Bcc” option (blind carbon copy) so that each recipient sees only their address when a message is received.
 - In any video calls or conferences with children, youth, or vulnerable adults:
 - Legal guardians should be nearby or available or written permission provided to account for absence.
 - The space is quiet(ish) or participants mute themselves.
 - Everyone is dressed as they would if they were in person.
- **CONSENT:** Ask permission of a child or an adult before physical affection (giving a hug, kiss, or holding a hand).
- **GROUP STAYING TOGETHER** During classroom time, participants should always stay together unless otherwise specified.
- **PICK UP** Parents are expected to pick up their children from classes. Teachers should wait for parents as they clean up. If a parent does not arrive, take the child to the social hour and find the parent. Parents are responsible for the safety of their children when the RE program time ends.

Policy Regarding Health & Emergency Safety

Emergency Procedures

- **General Emergency Procedure**
 - Call 911: For any life-threatening emergency, always start with a call to 911.
 - Provide details: Clearly state your location and the nature of the emergency.
 - Follow instructions: Follow the instructions of 911 operators and any designated on-site emergency personnel.
- **Fire emergency**
 - Evacuate: Leave the building immediately using the safest exit.
 - Do not return: Do not re-enter the building until it has been declared safe by the fire department.
- **Medical emergency**
 - Call for help: Immediately call 911 for any serious medical emergency.
 - Provide information: Give the dispatcher the exact location and nature of the emergency.
 - Stay with the person: Do not leave the person unattended unless there is no phone and the situation is very serious.
 - Be reassuring: Remain calm and reassure the person until emergency personnel arrive.
- **Active threat or intruder**
 - Run: If a safe escape route is available, run and do not take any belongings with you.

- Hide: If you cannot escape, hide in a secure location, lock doors, and barricade yourself in. Silence your cell phone, turn off lights, close blinds, and remain as quiet as possible. Do not call attention to yourself.
- Fight: As a last resort, and only when your life is in imminent danger, fight back with anything available.
- **Weather Emergency**
 - Thunderstorms: Stay indoors and move to an internal, ground-floor room. Avoid windows, metal objects, and electrical equipment.
 - Tornadoes: Move to a sturdy, interior room on the lowest floor of the building. Stay away from windows and all other openings.
 - Flooding: Never drive or walk through standing water. If you are caught outside, take shelter in a sturdy, enclosed building immediately.
- **If serving children, youth, vulnerable adults during an emergency:**
 - Once safe enough to do so: call/text guardians/caregiver, then call/text DRE.

PANIC BUTTONS: Panic buttons connected directly to our security company- who will contact the Police Station- are located in the pulpit, and provided to staff.

EVACUATIONS: The Congregation will be made aware of procedures to follow to evacuate the building in the event of an emergency

- Signs will be placed strategically in each room throughout the facility showing the exit route out of the building and procedures to follow once the building has been evacuated.
- Cards will be placed in the pews of the Meetinghouse and the Children's Church showing the exit route out of the building and procedures to follow once the building has been evacuated.
- The church will aim to offer evacuation drills periodically.

FIRST AID: A first aid kit will be available in the Church Office, Kitchen, and in the Nursery. First aid kits, disinfecting wipes are also available in each RE teacher's bin and in the nursery. There is also disinfectant available in both Nursery and Bathrooms to clean up blood, vomit, or urine. Alert DRE if an incident occurs that necessitates use of these items.

CPR & FIRST AID: All staff and volunteers are highly encouraged to seek and maintain training in CPR and First Aid. Nursery staff should have a basic babysitting course and/or extensive experience with children.

REPORTING SAFETY CONCERNS: The COM will be available for consultation and support around any problematic safety issue and will show respect and compassion towards all involved. Complaints about the physical facility, including burned out light bulbs, broken steps, unsafe stairs, etc., should be reported to the Church Administrator (manager@fpmilton.org, 617-698-6329) and/or Building and Grounds Chair.

RECEIPT OF SAFETY POLICY

I acknowledge that I have received and read the First Parish Milton Safety Policy. The Church retains the right to interpret, change, or delete these policies and procedures as it deems appropriate. Further, First Parish appreciates the attention and intention of each community member and friend of this congregation in upholding both the policy, procedures, guidelines and the spirit of this document.

Date _____

Print Full Name _____

Signed _____