

FIRST CHURCH UNITARIAN OF LITTLETON

SEXUAL MISCONDUCT and ABUSE POLICY

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I. Message from the Committee

In the spring of 2002 the Standing Committee accepted the charter of the Safe Congregations Committee. Our mission is to research and recommend a framework to ensure an atmosphere of respect and safety in all areas of human relationships in congregational life including but not limited to teachers, students, ministers, congregants, employees, contractors and guests.

In the spring of 2003 the Safe Congregations Committee submitted a Statement of Principles at the Annual Meeting, it was accepted by majority vote by the congregation of First Church Unitarian.

During the 2003-2004 church year, the committee focused on drafting the FCU Littleton Code of Ethics and the Child and Youth Supervision Policy for FCU Events. The documents were presented for review at three informational sessions in February of 2004. The final drafts were accepted by majority vote at the Annual Meeting in March 2004.

The Safe Congregations Committee developed the Sexual Misconduct and Abuse Policy. The policy consists of a Statement of Principles, definitions, prevention guidelines, and documents to be used for hiring and recruiting as well as a framework defining the role of a Sexual Misconduct and Abuse Response Team. The policy was presented to the congregation at three informational sessions in April 2005.

This policy is a living document and the congregation may in future years wish to amend it to reflect changing needs. Requests for such amendments should be made to the Standing Committee and voted upon at scheduled or special meeting of the Congregation.

First Church Unitarian, Littleton

Safe Congregation Statement of Principles

Dedicated to providing a supportive and nurturing environment, First Church Unitarian strives to ensure safety from violence and abuse of all kinds.

Intimidation, coercion, sexual harassment, or verbal, emotional, sexual or physical abuse will not be tolerated.

Abuse is not the fault of the victim. We encourage anyone who has experienced, witnessed, or become aware of misconduct or abuse to

report it
to the Minister, the Director of Religious Education or any member of
the Sexual Misconduct and Abuse Response Team.

III. Definitions

Abuse means: The non-accidental commission of an act which causes or creates a substantial risk of physical or emotional injury, or the commission of a sex offense against a child as defined by the criminal laws of the Commonwealth, or any sexual contact between a caretaker and a child.

Neglect includes failure by a caretaker, either deliberately through negligence or inability, to take actions necessary to provide a child with minimally adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical care, supervision, emotional stability and growth, or other essential care. This definition is not dependent upon location (i.e., neglect can occur when a child is in an out-of home setting).

Serious Physical Injury includes any nontrivial injury, addiction to a drug at birth, soft tissue swelling or skin bruising, failure to thrive, and death.

Serious Emotional Injury includes an impairment to or disorder of the

intellectual or psychological capacity of the child as evidenced by observable and substantial reduction in the child's ability to function.

Sexual Misconduct means any:

- a. Sexual abuse or sexual molestation of any person, including but not limited to, any person who is a minor, elderly, disabled or who is legally incompetent;
- b. Sexual Harassment is any unwelcome sexual advances; requests for sexual favors, sexually motivated physical contact, or other verbal or physical conduct, or communication of a sexual nature; or
- c. Sexual exploitation, including but not limited to, the development of or the attempt to develop a sexual relationship between ministers, counselors, youth leaders, church school teachers, etc. and a person with whom they have a caretaking role, whether or not there is apparent consent from the individual.

Mandated Reporter: Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 119, §51A ("51A Mandated Reporter")

obligates professionals whose work brings them in contact with children-including medical practitioners, educators, counselors, day-care workers, ministers, foster parents, police, firefighters and others - to notify the Massachusetts Department of Social Services (DSS) if they suspect the neglect or abuse of a child under the age of 18.

IV. Preventing Sexual Misconduct and Abuse

We at First Church Unitarian acknowledge that preventing future sexual abuse and harassment in our church communities and in society is a complex goal. In exploring this issue, we have learned that preventive education, careful hiring procedures, and policies regarding the circumstances of youth/adult interactions are concrete steps toward creating a safe environment for all concerned.

A. Education, Training and Supervision

We see education of all ages and levels of development as critical to the creation of a safe environment for growth. Information, knowledge and understanding support the development of healthier relationships based on self-esteem and respect for others. Greater understanding of the complexities of "sexuality" and "abuse" will make us better able to avoid situations that could lead to abuse, and to move more effectively toward justice and healing for us all.

The intention of our religious education program is to promote self-esteem and personal responsibility among our children and our adult membership. We as a congregation will attempt to provide the following as part of the educational program.

1. Age appropriate programs about development and sexuality for our children, teens (youth), and adults, which are offered on a regular basis and include greater clarification and understanding of the complex aspects of sexuality and related issues.
2. General training and support for our religious educators, youth leaders, and parents in areas of parenting skills, growth and development, sexuality, and related issues.
3. Information for all parishioners regarding resources within the community that address the issues of domestic violence and sexual abuse.

The Child and Youth Supervision Policy for FCU Events and FCU Littleton Code of Ethics were accepted by majority vote at the Annual Meeting in March 2004. All paid employees and Religious Education Instructors will receive a copy of the FCU Littleton Sexual Misconduct and Abuse Policy. This includes Child and Youth Supervision Guidelines, as well as the FCU Code of Ethics. All employees and volunteers will be expected to familiarize themselves with the policy. A copy will also be available in the church office.

B. Procedures for Recruiting Volunteers and Hiring Staff

1. Employees of the Church

All persons seeking paid employment at First Church Unitarian (but not limited to) the Church Administrator, Director of Religious Educations, Musical Director, Sexton, Minister and Ministerial Interns will complete an application for employment. They will be screened by the appropriate hiring committee who will contact references, record the contact, and conduct a formal interview with the candidate. A Criminal Offender Record Information ("CORI") check will be done on all employees. The application forms and CORI report will be considered confidential. They will be kept in a locked file in the minister's office to be viewed only by the minister. In the case of employment of a minister, only the Head Deacon may view the results of the CORI report.

All new employees will sign the FCU Littleton Code of Ethics. Persons already employed by the church will be asked to complete The FCU Littleton Code of Ethics.

2. Volunteers working with Senior and Junior Youth

All persons volunteering with youth, including senior and junior youth group leaders, Neighboring Faith Groups leaders, leaders of the OWL program, Coming of Age Program mentors, and any other program for youth will sign the FCU Littleton Code of Ethics. A CORI check will be done on all volunteers working with youth. These documents will be considered confidential. They

will be kept in a locked file in the minister's office and will be reviewed only by the Minister and the Director of Religious Education.

3. Religious Education Teachers

Sunday School teachers and other persons volunteering to work or spend time with children at FCU Littleton will be given a copy of the Sexual Abuse and Misconduct Policy to review and will be asked to sign the FCU Littleton Code of Ethics. A CORI check will be done on all volunteers working with children. These documents will be considered confidential. They will be kept in a locked file in the minister's office and will be reviewed only by the Minister, the Director of Religious Education.

V. Responding to Sexual Misconduct and Abuse

As members of First Church Unitarian it is our goal to educate and prepare ourselves in order to respond rationally, compassionately, and with unity of purpose should we suspect or be confronted with an incident or allegation of sexual abuse or harassment.

We wish to respond to individuals in crisis in a spirit of support and understanding, and to further justice and healing.

One of the first steps in creating a healing community is to create an environment of trust within which both victims and offenders feel safe enough to break the silence about what has happened. Given the obstacles that victims and offenders must overcome in order to break their silence, any disclosure should be viewed as a remarkable event. It is essential that disclosures be met with an appropriate and supportive reaction on the part of the receiver and the community. Inappropriate reactions or a lack of reaction can have the impact of repeating the abuse for victims and may inhibit the victim or offenders from seeking help in the future.

With this concern in mind, we have established a Sexual Misconduct and Abuse Response Team. We encourage anyone who has experienced, witnessed, or become aware of misconduct or abuse to report it to the Minister, the Director of Religious Education or any member of First Church Unitarian Response Team.

The Sexual Misconduct and Abuse Response Team

The Response Team will be established and in place at all times. The names and phone numbers of team members will be posted in multiple common areas of the church as well as the website. This team will be composed of the Minister and three congregants of First Church Unitarian. The Deacons will select congregants for two-year terms subject to the approval of the Standing Committee. In cases of a conflict of interest, a team member will be excused from participation and replaced by a suitable alternate. Members of the team will be well educated in the Policy and Procedures and will be knowledgeable about available resources for adults and children and specific mandated reporting procedures for children.

The Response Team will receive, document and determine appropriate recommendations in response to any allegation of abuse or neglect. In addressing the specific situation will The Response Team will be informed by **The Guidelines for First Church Unitarian Sexual Abuse and Misconduct Team**. The Response Team does not have the legal authority, or the expertise to determine guilt or innocence. The Response Team will not provide counsel or therapy. It is designed instead to protect members of the church, both children and adults, both victims (potential or actual) and the accused. While the charges are being investigated, the Response Team will work to protect and support all involved parties, in a way that allows the community to go about its business in a non-persecutory but safe atmosphere.

VI. The Special Relationship Between Minister and Congregants

We as a community expect the minister to abide by the UU Ministers Association's (UUMA) Code of Professional Practice. The Code acknowledges that ministers are the recipients of automatic trust. In subscribing to this code, ministers agree not to exploit the powers inherent in their roles.

Following are excerpts from the UU Ministers Association's Code of Professional Practice.

Self

.As a sexual being, I will recognize the power that ministry gives me and refrain from practices which are harmful to others and which endanger my integrity or my professional effectiveness. Such practices include sexual activity with any child or with an unwilling adult, with a counselee, with

the spouse or partner of a person in the congregation, with interns, or with any other exploitive relationship.

Colleagues

.I will strictly respect confidences given me by colleagues and expect them to keep mine.

Should I know that a colleague is engaged in practices that are damaging, as defined in our Code of Professional Practice, I will speak openly and frankly to her/him and endeavor to be of help. If necessary, I will bring such matters to the attention of the UUMA Board..

Congregation

.I will respect absolutely the confidentiality of private communications of members.

I will remember that a congregation places special trust in its professional leadership and that the members of the congregation allow a minister to become a part of their lives on the basis of that trust. I will not abuse or exploit that trust for my own gratification.

I will not invade the private and intimate bonds of others' lives, nor will I trespass on those bonds for my own advantage or need when they are disturbed. In any relationship of intimate confidentiality, I will not exploit the need of another person for my own.

I will not engage in sexual activities with a member of the congregation who is not my spouse or partner, if I am married or in a committed relationship. If I am single, before becoming sexually involved with a person in the congregation, I will take special care to examine my commitment, motives, intentions, and the nature of the activity and its consequences for the other person, the congregation, and myself.

Note: The complete text of the code is published in the UUMA's guidelines, which is available online at UUA.org. This policy incorporates the Code as it may be recommended in future by the UUMA.

In the case of the violation of this code, the Response Team will contact the UUA Director of Ministry and Professional Leadership at 617-948-6407 who will initiate an investigation. The Response Team will then work with the Head Deacon to establish the most appropriate methods of communication, and respond to reactions within the congregation and the community.

PASTORAL COUNSELING

Confidentiality is maintained in regards to communications during pastoral counseling sessions. Anyone seeking pastoral counseling should be aware that the 51A Mandated Reporter Law obligates professionals including ministers to notify the Massachusetts Department of Social Services (DSS) if

they suspect the neglect or abuse of a child under the age of 18.

Appendix A. F.C.U Littleton Code of Ethics

Statement of Position:

Adults and other youth in leadership roles in this congregation are in a position of stewardship and play a key role in fostering the spiritual development of both individuals and the community. It is, therefore, especially important that those in leadership positions be well qualified to provide the special nurturing, care, and support that will enable children and youth to develop a positive sense of self and a spirit of independence and responsibility.

The relationship between young people and their leaders must be one of mutual respect if the positive potential of their relationship is to be realized. Respect on the leaders part must include recognition of the absolute right of children and youth to the privacy of their bodies and minds. There are no more important areas of growth than those of self-worth and the development of a healthy identity as a sexual being. Adults play a key role in assisting children and youth in these areas of growth.

Statement of Expectation of Behavior:

As a Religious Education Worker, I will not:

1. Engage in behavior with children or youth that constitutes verbal, emotional, or physical abuse, including behavior or language that is personally threatening or demeaning.
2. Indulge in sexually harassing behavior or engage in sexual, seductive or

erotic behavior with children or youth.

3. Allow the use of tobacco, drugs or alcohol or any illegal activities among children or youth.

4. Be under the influence of illegal drugs, alcohol, or any other drug, which would impair my judgment or ability to function effectively in a leadership role with children or youth.

Statement of Action:

If I fail to meet the above expectations, FCU will take appropriate action.

Statement of Agreement:

I have read and understand the FCU Code of Ethics and Child and Youth Supervision Policy for workers with children and youth. I agree to abide the provisions of this Code of Ethics and Child and Youth Supervision Policy and to honor and preserve the trust placed in me by the members of this congregation.

Signature: _____

Name(please print): _____

Date: _____

Appendix B

Child and Youth Supervision Policy for FCU Events

For the purposes of this policy, a "group" is defined as one or more children and/or youth who are participating in a planned church program or childcare arrangement.

For the purpose of this policy, "supervision" is defined as the reasonable exercise and thoughtful action and responsibility by an individual, realizing that the immediacy of such direct supervision will vary with the ages of those in a group and the context of the activity.

Minors providing childcare must have an identified primary on-site adult.

Corporal punishment will not be used under any circumstances.

No adult, other than a family member, will be alone with a child or youth at a church sponsored event. RE classes may have one adult per classroom at the discretion of the RE director.

No one intoxicated, under the influence of illegal drugs or in possession of weapons shall be present at any RE sponsored events or programs.

There will be no illegal drugs or under-age consumption of alcohol at any RE sponsored events and programs.

Every teacher/volunteer will sign a Code of Ethics document and agree to abide by any safety policy created at FCU.

Parental permission is required for distribution of pictures of minors taken at church sponsored events. This includes publications in the FCU website.

TRANSPORTATION

Parents are responsible for transportation to and from events. If an adult other than a parent is transporting to and from church events, signed parental permission must be obtained.

All drivers must be able to provide proof of insurance and a valid driver's license.

There must be seatbelts for everyone and everyone must wear a seatbelt.

A minimum of two adults must accompany a group going off-site.

AMMENDMENT:

This policy shall continue to be reviewed by the Safe Congregation Committee and the congregation will review the policy in two years.

Sample Document A. Interim Agreement Regarding Restrictions with Children First Church Unitarian of Littleton

CONFIDENTIAL

A serious complaint has been made to the Sexual Misconduct and Abuse Response Team, which is now under investigation. While this complaint is being investigated, in order to protect the children in our programs from potential risk, to protect you from further suspicion, and to maintain confidentiality, we ask you to abide to this interim agreement. Signing this document in no way constitutes a presumption or a confession of guilt. Instead this interim restriction is a routine safety precaution, activated without prejudice toward particular individuals. This document will be considered confidential, will be kept in a locked file in the church office, and will be reviewed only by the Minister, the Director of Religious Education and the Head Deacon.

Within these guidelines, the church welcomes your participation in worship services, coffee hour, committee meetings, adult discussion groups, adult social events, and well-supervised intergenerational events. These guidelines are as follows:

1. Avoid contact with children on church property or at church-sponsored events. This restriction includes the following:

Please refrain from contact with children.

Please avoid volunteering or chaperoning for children's events (including children's religious education classes, talks with the children during worship services, specific children's activities at intergenerational events, and driving children to church activities.

Please remain in the presence of an adult at all times when children are in the building.

Please avoid conversations with children.

2. The church must provide safety for a variety of groups that use the building during the week. To that end, please avoid being in the building unsupervised when activities involving children are in session.

3. The church will attempt to keep this matter as confidential, while ensuring the church remains a safe place for our children. Please consider the Minister and the Director of Religious Education as your contact persons should further questions arise.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Witness: _____ Date: _____

Sample Document B.

**Members of the Congregation Needing Restrictions with Children
First Church Unitarian of Littleton**

CONFIDENTIAL

As we have discussed, the Sexual Misconduct and Abuse Response Team has serious reasons for concern that your contact with children and/or adolescents in our congregation potentially places both you and them at risk or incident or accusation. For this reason we have developed the following guidelines.

Within these guidelines, the church welcomes your participation in worship services, coffee hour, committee meetings, adult discussion groups, adult social events, and well-supervised intergenerational events. These guidelines are as follows:

1. Avoid contact with children on church property or at church-sponsored

events. This restriction includes the following:

Please refrain from contact with children.

Please avoid volunteering or chaperoning for children's events (including children's religious education classes, talks with the children during worship services, specific children's activities at intergenerational events, and driving children to church activities.

Please remain in the presence of an adult at all times when children are in the building.

Please avoid conversations with children.

2. The church must provide safety for a variety of groups that use the building during the week. To that end, please avoid being in the building unsupervised when activities involving children are in session.

3. The church will attempt to keep this matter as confidential, while ensuring the church remains a safe place for our children. Please consider the Minister and the President of the Board of Trustees as your contact persons should further questions arise.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Witness: _____ Date: _____

Acknowledgements

The Safe Congregations Committee of First Church Unitarian in Littleton would like to acknowledge our use of The First Parish Church of Stow and Acton's Sexual Abuse and Misconduct Policy as our model for our policy. We appreciate the hard work of the committee whose written work inspired ours. We would also like to thank Russell Hart, LICSW of The First Parish Church of Stow and Acton for his generous donation of time, advice and written materials. Without his generous consultation our work would have been more arduous and less productive.

We would also like to thank all past members of our committee who donated their time and energy toward the goal of creating safety in our church environment. Our mission was to research and recommend a framework to ensure an atmosphere of respect and safety in all areas of human relationship in congregational life. The intention of this policy is to provide that framework.

The Safe Congregations Committee would like to recognize and thank Linda Larratt who reviewed a draft version of the policy and offered meaningful direction and edits. We would especially like to thank Terry P. who performed the bulk of the work on the policies and procedures by preparing rough drafts for review by the committee.