

**First Parish in Bedford**

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Help us teach each other and our children that

**Everyone has rights and responsibilities:**

<b>Rights</b>	<b>Responsibilities</b>
To feel safe	To respect yourself
To learn and grow	To respect others
To be respected	To use commonsense
To be valued	To support others

## **Philosophy**

The members and friends of First Parish in Bedford are a caring, intergenerational community. Our Unitarian Universalist principles include the inherent worth and dignity of every person and a commitment to justice and compassion. We strive to create an environment that is welcoming and safe, promotes spiritual growth and supports us as we move toward human wholeness.

We recognize that injurious behavior can happen and that a church community is vulnerable to the ills that affect society. Although no policy or set of policies will guarantee safety, creating and adopting a Safe Congregation Policy sets a behavioral standard for staff, members, friends and visitors to our building and activities. Additionally a Safe Congregation Policy aims for proactive diligence in protecting the children, youth and adults of the First Parish community.

Congregational safety is the responsibility of the entire church community. We, the members of First Parish in Bedford, are aware of the prevalence of sexual and physical abuse and harassment in our culture; it crosses gender, race and class lines. There are survivors of sexual and physical abuse in our church, and statistics indicate that others, including many children, are at risk. We hold that it is the responsibility of all members of our church community to work at preventing sexual and physical abuse and harassment, and to promote the overall safety of all members of the First Parish community. We accept responsibility for educating ourselves and providing our children with age-appropriate information about sexual and physical abuse, exploitation, molestation, and harassment and we pledge to do our best to protect those who are at risk and to support those in crisis.

We acknowledge that preventing sexual misconduct, physical abuse and harassment in our church communities is complex. Additionally, guaranteeing building safety and absolute safety for people using the building is a desirable though elusive goal. Prevention education, training, careful hiring, best practices, and safety procedures are concrete steps toward creating a safer environment for all concerned.

## **Terminology**

The terms used in this document will have the following meanings:

Child abuse consists of any act of commission or omission that endangers or impairs a child's physical or emotional health and development. Child abuse includes any damage done to a child which cannot be reasonably explained and which is often represented by an injury or series of injuries appearing to be non-accidental in nature.

CORI stands for Criminal Offender Record Information. It is a record of an individual's Massachusetts criminal history, including any time s/he was arraigned in court on a criminal charge, no matter what the final outcome of the charge was.

Disruptive behavior is disorderly, repeatedly distracting, aggressive, hostile, unruly, obstreperous, troublemaking and/or possibly threatening conduct that requires intervention, mediation or other response.

Physical harassment or molestation or exploitation is activity that places a person in fear of bodily injury by such acts as threatening or tormenting behavior (bullying); compelling a person by force or threat of force to engage in conduct from which the person has a right to abstain; purposefully substantially restricting the movements of another person without that other person's consent; communicating to a person a threat to commit an act against that person or another person or entity, that instills fear and is threatening in nature; or similar repeated offensive physical or verbal conduct.

Professional misconduct is improper and/or illegal behavior by a member of the paid staff of First Parish in Bedford, that implies an intentional compromise of ethical standards; a misuse of the trust in place due to one's professional status.

Sexual abuse and sexual molestation is sexual touching, activity or conduct of one person to another without consent; lack of consent can result from physical and psychological intimidation, age or mental capacity, unusual vulnerability derived from the person's mental health or the existence of a relationship of significant dependency or trust.

Sexual harassment and sexual exploitation is an expression or behavior of a sexual nature, including but not limited to sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, unwanted attention of a sexual nature, and other inappropriate verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.

## **Developing a Safe Congregation Policy**

By charge of the Board, the Safe Congregation Policy has been developed with the help of staff, the Leadership Team, and volunteers from the First Parish community to focus on specific areas such as religious education, hiring and building safety.

It is the responsibility of the ministers, the Leadership Team, the Director of Religious Education, key volunteers, and the Board to promote congregational awareness about this policy, to insure that both the Policy and The Code of Ethics have been widely disseminated and discussed, and to inform church members and attendees of resources that address the issues in the policy, including but not limited to sexual abuse, emergency evacuation, professional misconduct etc. At the Annual Meeting on June 10, 2012, the board will present a summary of the Safe Congregation Policy that the board has approved.

## **Safety Congregation Response Team**

Following June 10, 2012, the Board (working with the Nominating Committee) will form the Safe Congregation Response Team (referred to as the SCR Team) by selecting 3-5 adults from the First Parish Community to serve 3, 4, and 5-year terms, plus a minister and/or the DRE\*. The SCR Team is tasked with dealing with problems, issues, and complaints of noncompliance with the Safe Congregation Policy. The SCR Team will hold in confidence all problems, issues, complaints, and outcomes, unless it is deemed necessary and important that the larger First Parish community should be informed. The SCR Team will work with the First Parish staff as needed, and make sure the staff is kept informed of outcomes.

The SCR Team is charged with communicating with the First Parish community regarding ongoing dissemination of the Safe Congregation Policy so as to inform newcomers and remind the First Parish community of the policy. This can be done through an annual article in the Parishioner and electronic announcement list. General communication about the Safe Congregation Policy should include the Code of Ethics. Members of the SCR Team will sign the Code of Ethics (Attachment A) and will have CORI check (Criminal Offender Record Information checks) done at the start of their terms.

\*should a complaint or concern involving a member of the SCR Team (staff or non-staff), that person will step down from the SCR Team until the complaint or concern is resolved. Resolution of the complaint or concern may include that the person no longer serve on the SCR Team permanently.

## **Nursery, Child, and Youth Safety**

1. The Director of Religious Education (DRE) with support from the Religious Education Committee (REC) is responsible for selecting, working with, and training leaders from staff and the Religious Education Committee to implement the following:
  - a. Age-appropriate information for our children and youth to support clarification and understanding of complex aspects of sexuality, through the use of the Our Whole Lives (OWL) program and other resources, as well as educating about sexual abuse prevention;
  - b. Annually review this Safe Congregation Policy with RE church staff, volunteer teachers, and parents;
  - c. Require that all volunteers working with and caring for infants, children and youth read and sign the following on an annual basis:
    - Code of Ethics (Attachment A),
    - Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) permission form (Attachment B).
  - d. Insure that the Safe Congregation Policy for Nursery, Child, and Youth Safety is followed and report suspected transgressions to the Safe Congregation Response Team and the local and state authorities as required by law.
  
2. RE Class Policy
  - a. Teaching Teams
    - i. Teams should consist of at least two teachers per classroom during the RE program on Sundays.
    - ii. At least one of the team of teachers should have been an active participant at FPB for at least one year or after six months if they have had previous teaching experience in a UU setting.
    - iii. Parents may serve as classroom aides and/or visit classes at any time.
    - iv. Teachers are subject to the approval of the RE Committee.
  
  - b. Classroom Procedures
    - i. RE teachers must record attendance in each classroom at the start of each class.
    - ii. RE teachers need to be familiar with the Emergency Evacuation procedure and have a copy in their Class Binder.
    - iii. At the start of each new term teachers must review the evacuation procedures with the children in their class.
    - iv. If a child is having difficulty in the classroom, teachers should implement the First Principle Policy, which affirms and promotes the inherent worth and dignity of every person.
    - v. The DRE or designate randomly checks in on classes during the course of a Sunday morning during class time.
    - vi. Teachers will request assistance when taking a child to the rest room or for other assistance. The DRE or designate will try to be available to take children to the rest room.

- vii. Any teacher, advisor, or parent who suspects or is made aware of an allegation of child abuse will report that concern to the Director of Religious Education or a Minister as soon as possible. If neither a Minister nor DRE is available, the concern should be reported to the President of the Board.
- c. Classroom Configuration
    - i. All classrooms must have internal windows.
    - ii. Classrooms must have Evacuation maps posted.
  - d. Screening Policy for RE Staff and Volunteers
    - i. CORI checks are performed on the DRE, the RE Assistant, hired nursery staff, all OWL and COA leaders and any adults working with students outside of regular Sunday morning sessions. Checks will be performed every 3 years.
    - ii. The DRE is responsible for performing CORI checks for volunteers. CORI for the DRE and other paid staff are processed by ????
    - iii. CORI information processed by the DRE is maintained in a secure file. DRE is responsible for maintaining CORI information for volunteers.
    - iv. The DRE will process annually a minimum of 12 CORI checks on a random and/or selective confidential basis of volunteers working with children, youth and teenagers. The designated leader or co-leaders of the Safe Congregation Response Team will have limited access to CORI checks only when researching a complaint or suspected misconduct. All parties will keep confidential the results of such CORI checks unless to do so is harmful to individuals and the church community. All volunteers working with children, youth and teenagers will be notified in advance they may be subject to CORI on a random basis.
    - v. CORI checks are used to alert the DRE and staff of potential problems. It is up to the DRE and The Safe Congregation Response Team to determine if the revealed offense should result in someone being asked to volunteer in a capacity other than Religious Education.
  - e. First Aid Policy
    - i. In the event that a student requires first aid, children will be brought to the RE office for treatment.
    - ii. If first aid is more than a bandage for a small or already present scratch, an incident report will be completed in the RE office.
    - iii. Teachers must be familiar with procedure when a child has a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis):
      - Parents are to notify the RE office if their child could require an epi-pen.
      - Parents with susceptible children are expected to provide epi-pens. The pens should be marked with the student's name and will be kept in the teacher's class binder.
      - REC members and teachers are required to have epi-pen training.
  - f. Field Trip Policy (insert policy from RE)

g. Sleepover Policy (insert policy from RE)

3. DRE Office Policy

- a. The DRE's office will maintain a complete First Aid Kit.
- b. No child should be left unattended in the DRE's office.
- c. The DRE's office door must be fitted with a window.

## **Staff Protocols**

1. All paid staff, including called and hired ministers are responsible for knowing and following the Safe Congregations policy, as well as the First Parish Personnel Manual.
2. It is the responsibility of the Senior Minister to see that all employees sign the Code of Ethics (Attachment A) annually in September/October of every year. Signed Code of Ethics will be filed in the personnel file of each staff member. Ministers will also sign the Code of Ethics annually in September/October.
3. All persons seeking paid employment at First Parish in Bedford including (but not limited to) the Minister, the Director of Religious Education (DRE), the Music Director, the Church Administrator, and the Sexton, will sign The Code of Ethics. They will be screened by the appropriate hiring committee or appropriate paid staff, which will contact references (at least one of whom has known the applicant for a minimum of four years), record the contact, and conduct both Criminal Offender Record Information background check plus a formal interview with the candidate. The employment application and reference material will be confidential and will be available only as required by law and to those responsible for screening, and hiring. Members of the Safe Congregation Response Team will have access to these records only if there is suspected or a complaint of professional misconduct. The decision to hire staff or call a Minister is contingent upon acceptance of the results of a current CORI background check. Subsequent CORI may be conducted at the discretion of the Minister, Board or Safe Congregation Response Team.
4. Called and hired ministers, and student ministers of First Parish in Bedford are held to the standards put forth in the Code of Conduct written by the UUMA (Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association) in the UUMA Guidelines for the Conduct of Ministry:  
<http://www.uuma.org/?page=guidelines>
5. The Director of Religious Education is held to the standards put forth in the Code of Professional Practices written by LREDA (Liberal Religious Educators Association): <http://lreda.org/content/code-professional-practices>
6. In cases of suspected or reported incidences of abuse involving staff, the SCR Team will follow the procedures outlined in the Responding to a reported or Suspected incident or complaint section of this Safe Congregation Policy. The SCR Team may ask a staff person to temporarily step down from their position until the matter is resolved if it is deemed essential for the personal safety of the accused, the accuser, or members of the congregation. If suspected or reported abuse involves a minister or DRE, the SCR Team will contact the UUA District office for advice and support from the District Executive or designate.

## **Responding to a reported or suspected incident or complaint**

1. The Safe Congregation Response Team will gather necessary information and develop a response plan for the situation. The SCR Team will turn to denominational headquarters, district staff, and legal counsel for guidance if needed.
  - a. This plan will be put in writing, be specific to the situation at hand, and include clearly delineated action items, time frames and responsibilities. Care will be taken to ensure confidentiality to protect the alleged victim, the accused person and the reporter until the appropriate state or local authorities issue a finding or take action. However, the health and well-being of the First Parish community will be considered in the timing of the dissemination of information. Rumor and innuendo are harmful. Therefore the SCR Team will determine with congregational leadership how and when to disseminate information to the FP community and (as much as possible) to the general public. The information dissemination plan must address the safety and peace of mind of all parties to the incident; including the alleged victim, the accused, the reporter, and church staff and members and friends and particularly the parents of children involved in the church school. The response plan will be designed first and foremost to address the needs of the victim and to insure that church policies are followed.
  - b. Additional meetings of the SCR Team will be scheduled as needed to monitor progress in carrying out the plan. Further, it may be necessary for the SCR Team to craft a revised plan, once the findings of state and local authorities are made known.

## **2. Responding to a Reported or Suspected Incident or Complaint of Abuse of a Minor**

### *Reporting Suspected Abuse of a Minor to Authorities*

- a. Because child abuse is addressed directly in state law, such cases require that in addition to the policies adopted by First Parish in Bedford, all state laws are followed. It is the responsibility of the ministers, DRE and members of the SCR Team to be aware of state laws regarding child abuse. It is not the function of the Minister, Director of Religious Education or Congregation President to conduct an investigation into accusations of child abuse. Rather it is state law and the policy of the First Parish in Bedford to immediately report any situation in which there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been or is likely to be abused or neglected. Additionally, all suspected abuse will be reported to the SCR Team.
- b. The SCR Team is responsible for keeping a confidential written record of the incident/s through interviews and a timeline of the incident/s and response to the incident/s. In all cases, the SCR Team will also notify the denominational district office to inform and seek her/his counsel.
- c. Once a report is made to the appropriate authorities, the church will rely on the decisions of those authorities as to the validity of the complaint. If the complaint is valid, the SCR Team will notify the church's insurance company. It is also the SCR Team's responsibility under these guidelines to develop an appropriate plan of response to the allegations.
- d. Interim Safety Plan: When a report is filed by any person on behalf of any child and the suspect is a church employee, member or attendee, the SCR Team will develop an interim safety plan during the investigation of abuse. This plan may include, but is not limited to restricting attendance of the suspected abuser to adult-only church events, having a "buddy" with the suspect at all church events, and refraining from any contact with children while attending a church function. The purpose of this plan is not only to safeguard our children, but also to

provide protection to the suspect from further complaints. If the suspect is another youth, the plan must be developed with input from both sets of parents or guardians. The plan will be clearly communicated to the suspect, or if a minor, to his or her parents or guardians, by the SCR Team. The Minister and/or DRE may implement similar steps while awaiting initial action of the SCR Team. The SCR Team working with the Minister and DRE will determine the content and timeline for communication with the church community regarding suspected abuse, if it's deemed necessary. The parents of alleged victims shall also be informed of this plan and involved, as appropriate, in its development.

- e. Permanent Safety Plan: Upon disposition by the Court, a permanent plan of restricted contact will be developed by the SCR Team. This will follow the guidelines established above for interim safety plans.

*Pastoral Needs of the Congregation Regarding Reports of Abuse of a Minor*

- a. Following a report of suspected abuse, the SCR Team, working with 2 church leaders selected from a minister, the DRE, and/or the Board president will develop a plan to address the pastoral needs of our congregation. The plan established will be such that other individuals are not put at risk for further incidents. It may be essential to develop a communication plan or to seek advice from the denomination regarding possible responses to the press.
- b. The SCR Team will request assistance from the Minister, the DRE, and other church staff in attending to the pastoral needs of the alleged victim, church members or attendees immediately affected by the incident (such as family member, partners or close friends), other members of the congregation who witnessed one or more incidents, members who having heard about the allegations are reminded of their own concerns and history, congregation members who are relied on to a great degree by the victim or offender, other victims who have been reluctant to come forward, and the accused member of the congregation.
- c. Pastoral care may include providing information about or referrals to appropriate professional, community, and church resources, as needed. Additionally the SCR Team may assist in dealing with state agencies, the District Attorney or the Police Department.
- d. Members of the SCR Team, the Minister, and the DRE will provide one another with special support and pastoral care during this process.
- e. The SCR Team will be mindful of offering support to the accused member of the congregation that may include helping the accused person access the appropriate professional, community, and church resources. While there may be feelings of ill-will toward the accused person, if that individual is a part of our community, he or she also deserves our support; withdrawing it at this critical point in that person's life might have severe detrimental long-term effects on his or her behavior in the future. It remains the mission of this church to recognize and support the integrity and inherent worth and dignity of that person even though we do not condone inappropriate behaviors, and to treat him or her with compassion.
- f. Additionally, other victims may be reluctant to come forward. If warranted, the response plan will include a way of reaching out to these individuals in a manner that is non-threatening.

### 3. Safety and Pastoral Needs of the Congregation Regarding Reports of Harassment

Incidents of alleged sexual or physical harassment of minors which do not warrant involvement of the DHS or DA shall be referred to the SCR Team. A plan shall be developed to address and resolve these complaints which shall make clear to the accused person that this church will not tolerate harassment of any form, as well as provide information about appropriate counseling or other resources for both the victim and the offender. The parents of the minor(s) shall also be informed of this plan and involved, as appropriate, in its development.

- a. Situations involving disruptive behavior will be brought to the attention of the SCR Team, the minister(s) and any other staff that might need to know or might be involved.
- b. Persons identified as being disruptive will be responded to as individuals of dignity and worth.
- c. Information concerning the alleged incident(s) that led to concern will be systematically collected from the concerned parties by SCR Team members and documented before any action is taken.
- d. The SCR Team will meet to assess the findings and decide on a course of action that will be reported back to the Board of Trustees, minister(s) and any other staff that might need to be involved, with the following four levels of response recommended.
  - Level One: A SCR Team member or members contacts the person named as the source of the disruption and informs them of the nature of the concern. The person's viewpoint of the matter will be elicited, valued and documented. SCR Team members will then assess the situation.
  - Level Two: If the basis of the original concern is determined to be valid, this finding will be clearly communicated to the person in question and a contract for clearly defined behavioral change will be negotiated. Such communication and contract will be documented and should include a path to true forgiveness and reconciliation.
  - Level Three: If the person in question refuses to negotiate a contract, refuses to be aided by the committee, will not be in relationship, or is engaging in behavior of sufficient severity, he or she may be excluded from the church for a specified period of time, with reasons for such action, and conditions for return, clearly communicated and documented.
  - Level Four: The person in question is permanently excluded from the church and the church premises with steps taken as needed to enforce the integrity of this decision.
- e. Should the SCR Team decide that exclusion or expulsion from the Church is necessary, they will consult with the Board of Trustees, minister(s) and all other staff that need to know and prepare prior to action being taken.
- f. The four levels of response recommended by this policy may be applied in the order determined by the SCR Team in counsel with the minister(s).
- g. If appropriate, the SCR Team may offer referrals for professional services. This committee can and should always solicit council from the minister(s) unless the complaint or questionable behavior directly involves the minister(s).
- h. In the event of imminent risk or actual harm to church members, church employees or church

property, immediate action will be taken to secure the safety of persons and property.

- i. All documentation developed in the course of investigating and resolving allegations of disruptive behavior will be kept confidential. The President of the Board of Trustees in counsel with the minister(s) will be responsible for determining access to such documentation and for ensuring its security.

The following are offered as dimensions to be used in assessing the nature and severity of referred problems:

1. DANGEROUSNESS – Is the individual a source of threat or harm to persons or property?
2. DISRUPTIVENESS - What is the extent of disruption to church functions?
3. CONGREGATIONAL INTEGRITY – How likely is it that existing or prospective church members will be driven away by the alleged behavior?
4. PROBABILITY OF CHANGE – How likely is it that the problem behavior will diminish in the future?
5. HISTORY – What has been the frequency and the degree of disruption caused by the individual in the past?

## **Alcohol Guidelines**

1. All federal, state and local laws and ordinances must be observed. This includes regulations required for the sale of alcohol, prohibiting the distribution of alcohol to minors and not serving alcohol to intoxicated persons.
2. Social events held at First Parish in Bedford and sponsored by active church members may include serving alcohol provided that the following policies are upheld:
  - Alcohol may be consumed only by those of legal drinking age.
  - Drunkenness will not be tolerated.
  - Cash bars are not allowed, unless a professional bartender is hired to oversee the serving of alcohol.
  - At any social or parish event where alcohol is served, ample non-alcoholic beverages must also be offered with equal accessibility
  - Alcoholic beverages and food containing alcohol must be clearly labeled and identified.
  - The serving of alcoholic beverages at events should not be publicized as an attraction.
3. It is a requirement that beverage alcohol not to be served to anyone, including adults, at any event directed primarily to and for minors. This includes events primarily for children, youth, and teens. Under no circumstances should minors sell or distribute beverage alcohol.
  - First Parish encourages non-alcoholic intergenerational events.
4. Sponsors of events are responsible for ensuring that these policies are strictly enforced.
5. Clergy, staff, and members of the Board responsible for ensuring these Guidelines are made known and observed.
6. The church administrator is responsible for communicating this policy to renters who are planning to serve alcohol.