

Safe Congregation Policy for First Parish of Norwell

Norwell, Massachusetts

Introduction

As a community of people of all ages, we at First Parish of Norwell (FPN) strive to create a safe and welcoming environment for everyone, particularly for our children and youth. This policy seeks to create a safe and secure environment where everyone has the structure needed to ensure the safety of themselves and others. This policy applies to all events where children and youth are present sponsored by the church, including but not limited to the following: religious education for children on Sunday mornings, youth group, nursery supervision, religious education and youth group functions, church retreats, intergenerational church events, and adult church events with childcare.

Policies for Staff and Volunteers Working with Children and Youth

A. Screening

- All applicants for staffing will be required to submit a written application, participate in an interview, provide two references (e.g., employer or volunteer position if possible) which are contacted before an offer is made, and complete a criminal background check.
- Lead teachers and assistants must be approved by the Religious Education Committee coordinated with the Director of Community Engagement (DCE).
- Volunteers involved with the church will be given preference but must complete the same requirements including a criminal background check.
- All applicants and volunteers will review and sign the Safe Congregations Policy.

The First Parish of Norwell reserves the right to not allow staff or volunteer applicants to work with children or youth if they have known to have criminal charges pending for, or who have been convicted of or have pled guilty to any sexual or physical abuse, battery, or assault charge.

B. Conduct for Staff and Volunteers

- The DCE (Director of Community Engagement) shall offer training to staff and volunteers at the beginning of each year. This training will cover basic safety policies and practices.
- There will be a minimum of two teachers, or a teacher and assistant, scheduled to each RE classroom on Sunday mornings. In the event that it is not possible to have a second teacher or assistant in the classroom, the DCE will serve as a second person in the class as much as possible for the morning.
- All classes will be visible and accessible. If the door does not have a window, the door will be left open at all times. The DCE, or a designated staff or volunteer, will walk through all classes throughout the morning.
- All children under the age of 12 must have a parent or another designated adult on the premises during Sunday morning services, unless prior arrangements have been made with the DCE.
- Children age 6 and below shall not be left without adult supervision at any time.

C. Social Networking

All communication between adults and children and youth must be in an open and transparent manner and include at least one other adult from the congregation with a CORI. All correspondence must follow the same guidelines as in-person contact, be used for the purposes of the event or class, be appropriate in language and content, meaning no harassing or vulgar language, sexual innuendo or bullying. Parents or guardians will be informed when any social media communication is established.

Supervision Staff and Volunteers Working with Children and Youth

A. Religious Education Classes and Youth Group

- All children/youth must have a registration form filled out for them every year by their parent or guardian that list any special needs/allergies/medicines/etc. Each classroom shall have a record of this information.
- Because of potential food allergies, no food is allowed in classrooms without the approval of the DCE or RE Committee chair.
- Parents and guardians are welcome to visit classrooms at any time. If a parent chooses to regularly visit a classroom, they should follow the guidelines of a volunteer.
- A parent or guardian is responsible for their child until the child is welcomed into the class or event by the teacher or leader. The Church is responsible for the child until they are picked up by the parent or guardian.

B. Church Event

- During coffee hour or other general church event, parents are responsible for the supervision of their own children. RE staff may be present to entertain the children, but they are not responsible for supervision at this time. Children are welcome to play outside, as long as an adult or RE staff is present. It is the responsibility of parents to make sure there is supervision before letting their child play outside.
- There will be a sign-in log for all children utilizing the church childcare.

C. Overnight Youth Events

- For any overnight Church/RE sponsored event any youth, two adult chaperones must be present and accessible at all times, checking on the youth at regular intervals. No bedding or coverings shall be shared between the youth.

D. Events Requiring Transportation

- All drivers must be at least 18 years of age, have a valid driver's license and the legally required minimum automobile insurance.
- Written permission by the parents or guardians of all minor passengers will be obtained prior to being transported. This permission will include all relevant details pertaining to the event, such

as date and location, name of driver(s), contact information, time of departure and time of return.

- While performing their driving duties, no driver may consume, use, or be under the influence of alcohol or any form of drug which can affect physical or mental performance.
- It is optimal to have two adults in each vehicle that is transporting children. In cases where this is not possible, no single adult shall transport less than two children or youth at a time.
- A parent or guardian is responsible for their child until the child is welcomed into the class or event by the teacher or leader. The Church is responsible for the child until they are picked up or dropped off with the parent or guardian.

Incidents and Emergency Care

A. Accident and Injury

- First Aid kits shall be available to staff/volunteers in convenient, defined locations.
- In case of serious injury, 911 will be called for emergency assistance. Parents and/or guardians will be notified as soon as possible, and an incident report shall be completed and submitted to the Director of Community Engagement and the Board of Trustees.
- In case of minor injury, appropriate first aid will be applied, the parent/guardian notified, and if the incident results in required treatment, an incident report completed and turned over to the Director of Community Engagement.

B. Incidents of Abuse or Neglect

- All teachers, adult assistants, and childcare providers, including staff and volunteers, who have reasonable cause to believe that a child has been subjected to physical, sexual or emotional abuse shall report this information immediately to the Department of Children and Families with support from the DCE or the Minister. To ensure that support, the individual should also immediately inform either the Minister or DCE.
- Those persons reporting the incident and receiving the report should respect the confidentiality of the involved parties.
- Adults, even if not in charge of an event, who acquire knowledge or a reasonable suspicion or concern that one or more youth has been abused or neglected should inform either the Minister or the Director of Community Engagement.

C. Incidents of Objectionable Conduct

- All teachers, assistants, and childcare providers, including staff and volunteers and adult members of the congregation, who observe or suspect that a child or youth has been the victim of objectionable conduct (including, but not limited to, bullying, harassment, and discrimination) shall immediately inform the person in charge of the church event and to the chair of the Parish Committee, the DCE or the Minister.

- As with cases of abuse, those persons reporting the incident and receiving the report should respect the confidentiality of the involved parties.

D. Allegations or Conviction of Misconduct

- The First Parish of Norwell has learned from experience that it helps to be transparent about these difficult issues and encourage everyone with an allegation or conviction of sexual misconduct to disclose this history to the Minister.
- Anyone who wishes to participate in any church related event and has been accused of sexual misconduct or convicted of a sexual offense must inform the minister of any past convictions of sexual misconduct. At that point a decision will be made about whether to continue with the process outlined below prior to any involvement with the church.
- The individual will meet with minister or child safety committee, and they will be asked to sign an Interim Safety Plan: Agreement Regarding Restrictions. This form will be kept confidential and shared on a need-to-know basis.
- If the accused or someone convicted of misconduct refuses to sign the Agreement, the person will be prohibited from all church-related activities.

I have read and understand the above policy. By signing this, I am agreeing to conduct myself in accordance with this policy and the laws of the State of Massachusetts. I understand that violating the terms of this policy may result in my being prohibited from involvement in First Parish of Norwell.

(Signed) _____ Date _____

Name (printed) _____