

Safe Building and Safe Children, Youth and Adult Guidelines

First Parish of Plymouth

We have a unique opportunity and responsibility to our children. We do this through our care, love, instruction, and nurturing of them while they are with us. The children among us now represent the future of Unitarian Universalism. The experiences that children have at First Parish will shape their views of the world. A warm, safe, friendly, and loving experience with us will give them important experiences and as they venture into a larger world. They will have the opportunity to relate to people of all ages, and they will learn the privileges and responsibilities of living in community.

This safety policy serves several purposes. It seeks to raise our awareness of potential problems in the care of our children, it establishes set procedures to safeguard children's well being, and it delineates resources that may be necessary in the event of an emergency. Safely nurturing our children must be an attitude of our hearts. This it requires the help of all members of the church family, young and old, to foster an atmosphere where children can safely grow in mind, body, and spirit.

Building Safety Guidelines

All of us in the congregation, and particularly those who take responsibility for groups of children, should know some basic facts about the physical aspects of our building. This will help us think quickly and clearly in the event of an emergency.

Please report any accidents or injuries to the minister or church secretary and complete any necessary insurance documentation.

Telephones

Meetinghouse: A telephone is located in the kitchen.

Parish House: In the Main Office, in the Minister's office, in the Director of Religious Education's office, and in the Basement kitchen.

Hallways and Kendall Hall

Children (and any adults so inclined) should not run in the hallways or during fellowship.

Bathrooms

Meetinghouse: There is one bathroom located in the hallway towards the front of the sanctuary, two are downstairs by Kendall Hall and one by the side entrance to Kendall Hall.

Parish House: There are two bathrooms on the main floor, one on the second floor and two in the basement. There is also a child-sized toilet in the bathroom off the nursery.

Kitchen

The kitchen is a wonderful resource, but it has potential dangers. No children should be in the kitchen without adult supervision.

First Aid Kits

Meetinghouse Fire Extinguisher: In the kitchen

Parish House: In each classroom and in the Director of Religious Education's Office.

Fire Extinguishers

Meetinghouse Fire Extinguisher: Side entrance hallway to Kendall Hall, kitchen by the locked Alliance china cabinet, back left corner of sanctuary, behind the lectern, and back entrance hallway to the sanctuary.

Parish House: Brewster Chapel in the front entryway, in the hallway by Brewster Chapel and the parlor, in the front entrance by the main office, upstairs in the room with the kitchen, in the second floor hallway, and one in the basement.

Emergency Evacuation and Fire Drills

Each fall and spring, the Sunday School will hold a fire drill.

Emergency exit plans are posted in each classroom. In general, follow the nearest exit sign to the outside of the building and proceed to the Meetinghouse.

In the case of an emergency evacuation of the Parish House, parents should stay in the meetinghouse and children will be brought to Kendall Hall through the back sanctuary door.

Guidelines for Appropriate Conduct Safeguarding Children and Youth

Selection and Screening of Staff

First Parish will obtain and have on file, a CORI (Criminal Official Records Investigation) report for any individual to be employed by the church. Reference checks will be done on possible staff members.

Selection and Screening of Volunteers

Volunteers for the Religious Education program must have regularly attended First Parish for at least six months.

First Parish will obtain a CORI report on any individual who volunteers to work with children. Each volunteer will be asked to sign a Code of Ethics form. Reference checks will be done on possible volunteers.

All programs involving children and youth observe an open door policy. Parents may visit and observe any program unannounced.

Classroom doors will remain open with the Director of Religious Education or other designee circulation among rooms whenever children's activities are being held.

Children in the Nursery will be signed In and Out by their parents.

Children and Youth will be walked over to Kendall Hall by their teachers at the end of class time. Teachers will make sure each child is matched up with a parent or with the Director of Religious Education.

Reasonable effort will be made to staff classes with: at least one worker for every three babies and /or toddlers; at least one worker for every 5 children age 2-5; at least one worker for every eight children in grade K-5.

Chaperons and Parents' Responsibilities

Youth Groups, and Field Trips of children and youth should be led by a minimum of two adults.

A parent or guardian must sign a permission form for activities held away from the church. Parents will be informed about location, departure, and arrival times.

Parents are responsible for their children during fellowship time after the service.

Children are not allowed in the choir room, back hall, back stairway, or kitchen unsupervised by an adult. Children are encouraged to remain in Kendall Hall's fellowship room or stage area during fellowship time.

Expectations of Behavior

Participants in all groups are expected to remain together throughout the meeting time.

Unsupervised separation from the group is not permitted, unless under direction of the leader.

Guidelines for Appropriate Conduct safeguarding all members of First Parish

Selection and Screening of Volunteers

Volunteers on committees such as Caring Committee or Social Action Committee, who will have independent contact with potentially vulnerable people, must have regularly attended First Parish for at least six months.

First Parish will obtain a CORI report on any individual who will have independent contact with potentially vulnerable people in the congregation.

The Protection of Children, Youth and Adults

Every person ministering to children and adults in any church program has a moral and spiritual responsibility to protect those children and adults. This responsibility is shared by both volunteer and salaried staff members of the church. The church should be a place of safety for all children and adults.

Mandated Reporters of Child Abuse/Neglect

Massachusetts' law requires an individual who is a mandated reporter to immediately report any allegation of serious physical or emotional injury result in from abuse or neglect to the Department of Social Services by oral communication. A written report must then be completed within 48 hours. All church volunteers and employees working with children clearly fall within the guidelines defining mandated reporters. Physicians, nurses, teachers, day care workers and foster parents are also mandated reporters. When suspected abuse is reported to the person in charge of an institution or school, then the person in charge, and not the staff member, is required to make the report. All reporters are immune from liability and in almost all cases, the reporter's name is not revealed to the family.

Sometimes people are unsure if a situation is abusive. If in doubt, volunteers/paid staff should speak with the Minister or Director of Religious Education immediately. If abuse or neglect is suspected, a report will be filed jointly with the volunteers/paid staff and the Minister or Director of Religious Education.

The Dept. of Social Services Child-at-Risk 24 hour hotline may be reached at 1-800-792-5200.

Definition of Abuse and Neglect

According to Massachusetts law and Department of Social Services regulations
(110 CMR, section 400):

Abuse includes:

- The non-accidental commission of any act by a caretaker, which causes or creates a substantial risk of harm or threat of harm to a child's well-being.
- The commission of a sex offense against a child as defined by the criminal laws of the Commonwealth.

Neglect includes:

- Failure by caretaker, either deliberately or through negligence, to take actions necessary to provide a child with minimally adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical care, supervision or other essential care.
- Physical dependence of a child upon an addictive drug at birth.

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